

What would they say?

Feb. 18, 2018

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If you're like me and someone very close, very special to you has passed from this life into the next, you've probably had moments where you've wondered, "I wonder what mom would say about this?" "I wish I could ask my dad some advice." "Only if John could see us now!" That impulse is where the question for this morning comes from: "What would they say?" The *they*, of course, are those who aren't with us any more. Specifically, the fellow FBCers who are now in the presence of Jesus; the FBCers who built this building we are all sitting in - back in 1966. For some of you, that's your mom and dad.

Those dear brothers and sisters are a part of our heritage and we must never forget that. But we have more than just them; the scriptures themselves give us a lineage of faith to draw from. The most famous list of these people is found in Hebrews 11; let's turn there. The first half of chapter 11 describes in great detail the specifics of faith regarding certain people from the scriptures like Abraham and Moses. But the chapter closes with somewhat of a sweeping summary of others; we know some of their names and others are anonymous to us. But both are an example. Look what it says (READ Heb. 11:32-38)

For our purposes this morning, notice just one point: see how these unnamed heroes of the faith experienced both highs and lows in their journey. Because of faith, some were rescued from the mouth of lions, some were spared the edge of the sword, some received back their dead. And also because of faith, some were sawn in two, some were thrown in jail, some had nothing but sheep and goat skins as clothing they were so poor.

Here's a very important point for you and me: our faith in Jesus is not a ticket to a successful, easy, pain-free life. Faith in Jesus is not a promise of deliverance from the unpleasantries and sufferings on earth, it's deliverance from the unpleasantries and sufferings ultimately in the next life. Friends, in my experience, we've got to get this right. Just like the scriptures say, we have to see with the eyes of faith; we must perceive of life with eternity in mind and not this world in mind. The exceptional comfort of our modern conveniences and our wealthy western culture tempts us so greatly to prize the earth more than eternity. Let's not make this mistake.

Now, I'm going to read Hebrews 12:1-2 right now and notice how the example of those who came before us informs or shapes the command we're given (READ).

Do you see how the memory of the saints shapes the command? Why does the writer say, "since we are sounded by so great a cloud of witnesses?" Why doesn't he just tell us what he wants us to do? It's because the example of faith of others inspires and strengthens our faith. We have brothers and sisters who have seen kingdom success in their lives like we are hoping for in ours. Their marriages were saved by the ministries of FBC; they prayed fervently for their

unsaved neighbors and then saw faith bloom. Students, 15 years ago, 20 years ago, there were teenagers just like you going to the Youth Center, having youth group, getting encouragement from leaders and the scriptures who today have families, have good jobs, and who now encouraged by the Lord to make an impact in the world today; Students, it will happen with you, too, if you follow their example.

But also, some of those same brothers and sisters have walked the valley, too. They've gone through depression; they've struggled with their marriage; they've made some really bad decisions, just like we've made. And God was with them the whole time holding them up when nobody else could.

In good times and in bad times, they had faith. And that faith is supposed to inspire you; that faith is supposed to give you a little more courage than you had when you first walked in this morning. You're supposed to say, "If God helped them, then I believe he'll help us." That's what asking, "What would they say?" is supposed to do. It's supposed to help you and I do what we must do to stay faithful to God.

So what is that? What is the thing we're told to do with the help and encouragement of so great a cloud of witnesses? Do you see the command? Run! Run the race of faith, FBC! Don't stop going! This reminds me a ton of what Paul said to Timothy as he approached the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:7), "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." And in that is the answer to what it means to run. It means to keep the faith. It means we don't stop trusting in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. It means we don't stop dying to self. It means we keep sacrificing our time, our money, our desires, our preferences for the kingdom work of God. It means, we don't stop living this kind of life when it gets hard, when everybody else is telling us it's not worth it, or when it doesn't seem to be working like I was hoping it would. I keep running.

What would they say? I really think they would tell us to keep running, to keep going; not to stop. I've been here at FBC for over 14 years now and I think back on some of the faithful friends who are now gone. I'm convinced if they were here they would smile; they would give us a big thumbs up; they've pat us on the back and say, "Run! Don't stop! Keep going! It's worth it." They might also say, "What took so long?" or maybe "Did you need to spend that much money?" or "Why didn't we do this when I was still around?" But think of it: those who have gone ahead of us, they have eternity in mind in a way we don't. They know what we believe; that all the sacrifices we make for Jesus are worth it and they would say, "Run!"

But we also learn something else from Hebrews 12; we learn what we need to do to run well. Did you see that? There are three things we need to do to run well. Here's the first thing.

*We've got to run with endurance.* Do you know what that tells us? It tells us that this race of faith is not a sprint; it's a marathon. For fast HS boys, the 100 M dash takes about 11 seconds. The 400 M in about 50 seconds. And the mile takes just about 4.5 to 5 minutes. Do

you know how long a marathon takes? 4 hours; 5 hours... 8 hours for some. Life and faith is a marathon; it's not a sprint. You've got to have endurance to finish this race, friends. Can I ask you a question? What are you doing today to prepare yourself for the marathon of life? Because that's what it takes, right? Preparation? You wouldn't dare run 26.2 miles without getting ready, would you? You'd never make it!

Do you think you'll make it to the end of life faithfully, sacrificially, joyfully in the Lord without regular contact with your brothers and sisters Christ? Do you think you'll make it without hearing the word regularly? Do you think you'll make it without intentionally telling yourself the truth of the gospel and taking every thought captive when the lies of the Evil One flood your minds? It's not going to happen, friends. The race we are running requires endurance.

The second practice we have to get right to run well is *lay(ing) aside every weight*. Here's some of my winter gear. Here are my heavy-duty coveralls. My snow boots are pretty big and heavy. Do you think I could run well with this heavy, unnecessary weight? Not a chance. If you're going to run, you've got to shed the weight that keeps you from running well.

Now, maybe you're thinking, "Do I have to shed the weight that's not a sin?" Do you know what I mean? Can I date this girl? Can I go to that movie? Do I have to go to church every Sunday? Can I be honest with you: what kind of question is that? *As long as I'm not sinning, isn't it ok if I...* That's about the worst question we can ask! The right question is, "Will it help me run to win the prize?!" Wearing all this gear may not be illegal; it might not break the rules, but it won't help me run, will it? Don't ask, "Can I still do it if it's not a sin?" Ask, "Will it help me run!" Does me dating so-n-so help me run? Will having this nightly, TV routine help me run? What will help me run better: worshiping with my brothers and sisters and hearing God's word every week or whenever I feel like it? Friends, to run you've got to lay aside every unnecessary weight so you can run well.

The final practice we have to get right to run well is *lay(ing) aside the sin that clings so closely*. What a helpful (and sinister) picture of sin. Sin clings so very closely. Boy, that sure matches my experience. I've never had success taking a casual, it-will-all-work-out approach with my sin. Sin is relentless. It holds on and does not let go.

Friends, I don't want to belabor the point, but it's important to say: we have to get serious about killing our sin to run well. You can't be casual about the sin that clings so closely. You have to be radical. Be killing sin, FBC, or sin will be killing you.

What would they say? Run! That's what they'd say. Let's pray and ask God to help us do just that.