

Session 13: Are you being watched from above?

According to the Word of God, there are witnesses from above that are cheering us on...in a positive way as we run the race of life!

Hebrews 12:1-4, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”

A Summary of the Christian Life....Giving Us a Reason to Keep Moving Toward the Mark...the Goal...the Objective.

1. In the Christian Life, We Have a Goal!

Christians are tourists that move on to the next stop...in lieu of going back to where they started. Ask yourself the question at the end of the day... “Am I any further this evening on my journey than I was this morning?”

2. In the Christian Life, We Have an Inspiration to Go On!

Think of the unseen cloud of witnesses; witnessing our trials and troubles and urging us to perform well in this race (like spectators observing our championship match).

Christians (you and I) have a crowd watching us pressing on toward the mark. They want us to receive the prize in which they have already been crowned.

This is one that I am not sure as to the extent the witnesses might be observing in heaven. A witness is one that actually has seen or heard things that helps either condemns or convicts. They are not the jury. They are not the judge. I personally think that since heaven is a place where there is no pain or sorrow, I would support the interpretation that the witnesses are a support group for the ones who have not reached their goal/destiny. If that is the case, they see only the positive areas of our life. They do not look down on sin nor see the sins committed. Open for suggestions on this one! What do you think?

3. In the Christian Life, We Have a Handicap.

The handicap is sin in our lives. If we want to climb Mount Everest, we do not want to carry unnecessary or useless baggage that would weight us down. We must discard bad habits, ungodly pleasures, and self-indulgences that hold us back. As a sprinter for a track team would not run the race with his sweat pants on, we don't need to run the race of life with sins that “so easily beset us.”

4. In the Christian Life, We Have a Means (Self Endurance).

This is a means in which nothing will keep us from reaching the goal. We hurdle over the obstacles that try to deflect us from our goal. We set our sight on the finish line and we will continue to strive to get there no matter what gets in our way.

5. In the Christian Life, We Have an Example.

Jesus endured all things...even the old rugged cross. Despising the shame...enduring the humiliation (the worst punishment only given to the worst

criminals)...Yet He accepted it...because He knew the prize that was at the end of the journey. Not just for Himself...but for all believers.

6. In the Christian Life, We Have a Presence.

The presence of God (In Spirit). He is both the goal of our journey and the companion of our way.

Note: He is the One we go to meet and the One with whom we travel.

Don't give up too soon; don't collapse until the winning post is passed...until the finish line has been crossed.

We press on surrounded by saints, not worried about the obstructions that get in the way of our goal....remembering the glory of the goal....always in the company of the One who has already made the journey and reached the goal, and who waits to welcome us when we reach the end.

Revelation 21:1-7, "Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children."

According to the Word of God, every thought and every act is being observed and written down.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames."

Revelation 20:12-13, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done."

Hebrews 12:5-11, "And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are

not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

The Discipline of God....Summary: We must bear hardship and trials because it is sent as a discipline from God....and no life can have any value without discipline.

The Many Ways in Which People Look at Discipline that God Sends:

- ***They may resign themselves to it and accept it.***
Wait a minute. The thought of man resigning himself to thinking... “I can’t resist God’s discipline because if it is God’s will to crush me, He will” is not of God. This is a discipline out of power in lieu of love.
Discipline comes to encourage, not to discourage. Discipline promotes healing...promotes a desire to do better....promotes a will to keep going on.
- ***People may accept discipline with the grim sense of getting it over as soon as possible.***
An attitude of defiance in lieu of one with gratitude for keeping us on the right track.
- ***People may accept discipline with self-pity.***
Those that let everyone know that they are going through hard-times and enjoy the “Woe is me life.” They get attention and never realize the ultimate goal of godly discipline.
- ***People may accept discipline as a punishment which they resent.***
Worst than a “Woe is me attitude.” It is an attitude which leads to resentment for God Himself. A “Where is the loving God that is supposed to be on my side?”
- ***People may accept discipline as coming from a loving father.***
This is the only attitude on discipline that we should accept and count as constructive, wise...and biblical.
“The greatest anger of all is when God is no longer angry with us when we sin.”
(Jerome).
The greatest punishment is when God leaves us alone as unteachable.

We must remember that the discipline of God arises only out of love and is always aimed to cause us to desire to be better....the theme of Hebrews... “BETTER”

Hebrews 12:12-29, “Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. ¹⁴ Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. ¹⁶ See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done. ¹⁸ You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” ²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.” ²² But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. ²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” ²⁷ The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.”

The Problems in the Daily Christian Life, the Pursuit of Living by the Christian Principles, and the Promise of God for Reaching the Goal.

The gifts of God are given...but they are not given away; they have to be won, for they can be received only on God's conditions...and the supreme condition is a faith to be obedient to Himself....through His Son.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us of:

- ***Our duties as a Christian***

One of our duties as a faithful follower is to be an encourager of those who are near to despair and a strengthener of those whose strength is failing.

Christians have a double duty:

- 1. Duty to God***
- 2. Duty to other people.***

- ***The aims which must guide the Christian:***

- ***Aim at Peace***
- ***Aim at Holiness***

- ***The dangers which threaten the Christian Life.***

God's Holiness and Man's Unworthiness—

Isaiah 6:1-5, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

“True worship begins when we stop and gasp at the wonder, power, and Holiness of God. Worship begins when we catch of glimpse of Holiness.

Of all the attributes of God . . . holiness is the one that seems to take center stage.

The first response of an unholy person to the holiness of God is an acute awareness of personal sin. When the unholy confronts the holy we become very conscious of our own sinfulness. It is like we live most of our lives with some of the lights off . . . we are able to hide some of our wickedness in the dark. But when we come into the presence of God the darkness is gone. All the hidden is exposed.

What does the words, “without holiness no one will see the Lord” actually mean?

The Scripture is clear on two points.

1. ***The best Christians can never in themselves merit salvation through their personal holiness.***

*“Our righteous deeds are like filthy rags in the light of God’s holy law” (Isaiah 64:6)
Our best works are stained and polluted with imperfection and sin.*

2. ***Scripture repeatedly refers to the obedience and righteousness of Christ on our behalf.***

“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).

“For Christ died for your sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

However, the writer of Hebrews says, “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

***What does the writer mean, “To make every effort to....be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)?***