

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 18, 2013 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

FAITH TO ENDURE IN TIMES LIKE THESE

A Final Word – How?

Luke 9:23, Hebrews 11:6 & 12:1-3

In Times Like These

By Ruth Caye Jones

In times like these you need a Savior, In times like these you need an anchor;
Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One; This Rock is Jesus, the only One!
Be very sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

We have been using this hymn for the past several weeks as the stimulus for our study, “Faith to Endure in Times Like These,” and what a great old song it is. We certainly recognize that in times like these that we live in today we need a savior and an anchor, but not just any savior and not just any anchor. The real key is that in times like these, that we have been describing and talking about in the past few week we need Jesus as Savior and anchor of our life and faith. He is the Solid Rock that helps us to have an enduring faith no matter what we face in this day and age. So what is the real story behind this great old song.

In 1944, a housewife named Ruth Caye Jones was concerned about the state of the world. The country was in the middle of World War II. Hitler, the Nazi army and the Japanese military were waging war around the globe. Mrs. Jones was at home completing her daily household tasks. She was burdened and stressed by the turmoil and evil in the world, but felt the Holy Spirit speak to her and brought these comforting words to her. She stopped what she was doing and wrote down both the words and the music to this song.

The Bible speaks often about certain kinds of “times.”

3 Different Kinds of Times the Bible Speaks About:

- 1. Perilous Times** – 2 Timothy 3:1-5 says *“¹But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ²People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power.*

Have nothing to do with such people.” Are we living in “times like these?” I think the answer is Yes.

2. **Last days** – 2 Peter 3:3-4 says *“³ Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”* Are we living in “times like these?” Once again, I believe the answer is Yes.
3. **End Times** – Jesus said in Mark 13:7-8 *“⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.”* Are we living in “times like these?” Once again, I say Yes.

But I am grateful today that this great hymn reminds us what we need “in times like these.” We need a Savior. We need the Bible. We need an anchor. Hebrews 6:18-19 tells us *“¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain...”* We can testify with the author of this hymn. In times like these, we have a Savior and we have an anchor.

Couple of comments on the lyrics:

2 Comments from the Lyrics of “In Times Like These”:

1. **“You need the Bible”** – In a world where we are constantly bombarded with depressing news about our country and our world, there is a place we can go to receive rest and comfort for our soul. We can’t get it from television, the newspaper or the internet. Those things cannot bring inner peace in a world of turmoil. Those things do not bring encouragement to our soul. The Word, however, is a lamp and a light. It is healing for our bones. It brings comfort and peace. We do need the Bible in times like these.
2. **“O be not idle”** – The Bible has plenty of warnings for the idle and the slothful. There is work to be done. There are laborers needed in the vineyard. We must not sit idly by in times like these. We must not let the negativity and sin of this world cause us to throw our hands up as people with no hope. No, we have a master who has called us to work. Some at the third hour, some at the sixth hour, the ninth hour, and even at the eleventh hour. But woe to those who are found idle when the Master is needing workers in the vineyards.

So, we are living in tough times, and it doesn’t take a lot of discernment to know that. We began our study on “Faith to Endure in Times Like These” several week back now, and our study has really centered on Paul’s words in his letter to Timothy... particularly in the second letter and the his closing comments. Paul tells us in no uncertain times that “difficult times” are upon us. Well, how does the Christian cope? What are the techniques that spur us on and keep us stable... help us to endure in times like these? This study has centered on such questions. We have looked at our need to stand strong in times like these and Paul’s encouragement found in verses 1-5 of 2 Timothy 4. We have talked about not giving up, but finishing well in 2 Timothy 2:6-8. We have looked at how to deal with opposition, which us sure to come and Paul’s

encouragement in 2 Timothy 4:9-18. And last week we talked about enduring through time of loneliness and Paul's encouragement in 2 Timothy 4:9-22. This evening we want to close out this study by asking the big "HOW?" question. We know we are living in difficult times, that test and try our faith, that threaten to undermine our faith and weaken our faith. Times that challenge and tempt many Christians to even want to throw in the towel and get discouraged. How do we navigate and survive in times like these? How do we have a faith that endures in times like these? So here is a final word... the how to. We are going to leave Paul's word to Timothy and go to the wise writer of the book of Hebrews, who was writing to believers who were living in perilous and difficult times, who were being challenged and tempted to throw in the towel, discouraged in their faith, and perhaps really asking if it was worth it all. The writer of Hebrews counsels us *"... Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."* That is a relevant statement for those of us living today!

"⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." – Hebrews 11:6

"^d 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." – Hebrews 12:1-3

I. WHAT IT TAKES TO PLEASE GOD?

"Flash in the pan" is a popular way of describing someone who starts off on the path of faith (the Christian faith) with a lot of noise and flurry but soon fades and passes from the scene. Such people are a dime a dozen. They are quick to begin with great enthusiasm, lots of big ideas, loud talk, heated emotion and a lot of dynamic commitment that is going to shake the world and storm the gates of hell; but when the going gets rough and the path of following gets long... and it will, they drop through the cracks. They have no staying power. They lack endurance: the ability to tough it out over the long-haul. In order to have a real faith that endures... genuine faith that endures requires much more. The verse we are about to consider addresses the need for faithful endurance even when there isn't applause, tangible trophies, or relief from pressure... endurance in following Christ even when there is hardship and hostility and the ever-present temptation to grow weary and quit. This describes the "arena life-style" of faith that endures, an unpopular and painful reality that the child of God must face head on if he or she is to really endure.

Hebrews 11:6 says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."* Some say that pleasing God requires doing the sensational or looking for the mystical and unexplainable. But faith was never designed to be like that. Faith fits into the fabric of life just as clothes fit on our backs and shoes fit on our feet. The faith-life or enduring faith as we are called to by Jesus, so wonderful and necessary for a believer, is characterized by three indispensable ingredients according to Jesus own call to his followers.

²³ Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” – Luke 9:23

3 Indispensable Ingredients of Faith that Endures: (Luke 9:23)

1. **Faith that endures requires that we come to God** – This means that you and I must possess an attitude of total dependence on, and available to, God. As Jesus said in **Luke 9:23**, we must **“deny ourselves”** and by implication of such, become totally dependent on God.
2. **Faith that endures requires that we believe God is there** – This means that you and I must have unswerving confidence in His presence, which we cannot see, and in His concern, which we may not always feel. How else can we possibly **“take up our cross daily”**?
3. **Faith that endures requires that we trust Him, and earnestly seek Him** – Again Jesus said in **Luke 9:23**, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”** In other words... trust Him with our heart and follow him whole heartedly with our life.

II. BRIEF BUT NECESSARY CLARIFICATIONS

Hebrews 12:1-3 pictures a stadium scene... an arena, if you will, with grand stands filled, with participants in view, with an event taking place before the crowded stands and apparent challenges and obstacles to the event. That is a picture of the enduring faith that we have been discussing in this study... one that involves 1) self-denial, 2) cross-bearing, and 3) following Him no matter the cost or running by faith the race marked out for us as believers. The reality is that this thing called life is “tough” (or “perilous” as Paul says in 2 Timothy) and following Jesus is often (most of the time) “tougher.” Not because following Jesus doesn’t carry with it huge blessings, a deep seeded joy, a peace that passes understanding, great abundant life and victory, but because really living for Him and being sold out to him in genuine faith can be so hard given our own sinful nature and this old world we live in.

Characteristic of the Arena of Life: (in which we follow Jesus)

1. **Difficulties of common life** - When we become Christians, we enter the arena – in which there is the reality of pain, heartache, sickness, sorrow, pressure, hardship, and even death. Let’s face it, like Paul said, we are living in perilous times that require for a believer a faith that endures. And this should come as no surprise to believers, because Jesus’ own call to us was this in **Luke 9:23**, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”**
2. **Difficulties of our own making** - To these things we can add our own humanity, wrong habits patterns, personal weaknesses, and conflicts with others.
3. **Difficulties of the enemy** - Also in that arena is a world that’s bent against God, and a host of satanic forces that are committed to our failure and defeat.

NOTE: *Since we have entered the arena of life, we have need for endurance and encouragement. This is why name after name of endurers are listed in Hebrews 11. We stand reminded that we can endure because they endured by faith before us.*

III. AUDIENCE SURROUNDING THE ARENA (Hebrews 12:1)

The writer of Hebrews speaks here of *“so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us.”* Who are these witnesses, and what is the scene? The picture is of the writer walking down the track in the stadium of life. There he envisions the contest, the race, or as it is called in the Greek, the “agona” (from which we get our English word “agony”). As he walks, he begins to hear the sounds of great men and women, courageous martyrs, shouting words of hope, endurance, and encouragement to people in battle. Those who form this great cloud of witnesses are the people of chapter 11 and a whole host of others you and I could list. **NOTE:** The writer does not seem to be saying that these people actually watch us from heaven, but that their lives stand as models demonstrating that we can make it through the race – that we can persevere and, in fact, must do so.

What do you think that the following might be saying to us in the faith enduring race we are involved in?

1. Abel – “Offer God your best by faith” (Heb. 11:4)
2. Enoch – “Walk with God” (Heb. 11:5)
3. Noah – “Believe and follow even when you don’t understand and it doesn’t make sense” (Heb. 11:7)
4. Abraham – “Follow God by faith even when you don’t know where He is leading you or how he is going to work everything out.” (Heb. 11:8-19)
5. Isaac – “Following God will bless your family... those coming behind you.” (Heb. 11:20)
6. Jacob – “Following God will bring you to see past all the hurts, disappointment and heartache of the journey” (Heb. 11:21)
7. Joseph – “Following God will give you a perspective and vision beyond what this world understands.” (Heb. 11:22)
8. Moses – “God has a trustworthy place and plan that He is leading you and He will go before you and accomplish what He says.” (Heb. 11:23-29)
9. Rahab – “Trust where God is leading you.” (Heb. 11:31)
10. Host of Hebrews 11:32ff – “God can do and accomplish amazing things if you will follow Him by faith.”

IV. WITNESSES OF THE RACE (Hebrews 12:1a)

Our life circumstances (pertaining to the Christian experience) are portrayed in this text as a race to be run in faith’s energy. The Greek word “race” is the same one from which we get our English word “agony.” While running this race, we’re informed that *“... we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...”* This raises three questions...

Three Questions Surrounding the Witness That Surround Us in Hebrew 12:1:

1. **Who are they?** – The first word of **verse 1** serves as an important clue, *“Therefore.”* It calls attention to chapters 10 and 11, and those who exercised enduring faith. What

- has been written was essentially designed to encourage us today to be like those of the past and to see that we also can walk by faith and not by sight. Observe the interesting fact introduced regarding **“a cloud of witnesses”**... these faithful ones of the past days watch those of us running the race. On earth they were men and women – with needs like ours – who trusted God, and they lived and died with that on their record. They are witnesses in that they provide us with their testimonies, saying, “Stay with it... it’s worth it... you can do it... God will pull it off... look up!”
2. **Where are they?** – According to the writer in verse 1, **“... we are surround...”** by them. We are surrounded by them not in a physical sense. These are not some kind of celestial ghost that are around us... ancestors whose spirits haunt us. Not this idea is in a spiritual sense. The testimony of these Saint, left behind surround us with the encouraging testimony that faith works, that it can endure, that it holds up, and brings ultimate victory. In another sense, these Saintly witnesses are in Heaven’s grandstand cheering us on. These saints, having already died and gone before us, constitute a great celestial stadium of spiritual fans reassuring us during the race... cheering us on essentially.
 3. **Where are we?** – We are in the race of our lives, and it is not always easy... more often than not is an agonizing race. Remember that is the Greek word translated here as race. We’re on the floor of the arena (earth) participating in the race (“agony” from a human point of view). It can be likened to a marathon that takes a lifetime to run. The starting blocks are conversion; the take at the end is our physical death. The time between the conversion of the soul and the exhaling of the final breath... that the race.

V. **PREPARING FOR THE RACE (Hebrews 12:1b)**

Since faith is not a human trait, we are untrained for trusting God. Our society ingrains us with humanistic ideals rather than those of faith – **“When the going gets rough, reach deeply and hang on. You can do it.”** *What is wrong with this philosophy?* With time, however, comes the painful and disappointing reality that self-effort and self-help don’t work. We need the help of that cloud of witnesses. We must also recognize the counsel of the inspired writer who offers us running tips introduced in our passage by the words **“Let us...”**

2 Things to Lay Aside in the Race:

1. **Every encumbrance** – The term “bulk” or “mass” – something superfluous and unnecessary. Participants in the Greek games would warm up months in advance. The athletes would meet and live in the most difficult circumstances, eat only the most nourishing foods, and would work out from morning until evening. In training they would wear weights around their wrists, ankles, and sometimes their waists, to help them build up their stamina. When it came time for the race, the weights and unnecessary clothing came off. All hindrances to swift performances were deterrents to successful running. Some kinds of encumbrances Christians can tote are indifferent attitudes, lack of discipline, or procrastination.
2. **Easily entangling sin** – The term “sin” is in the singular and is a reference to a definite kind of sin that, when wrapped around the runner, causes him to fall or stumble. The context of chapters 10 and 11 helps us to know what that sin would

be... it is the sin of unbelief, or doubt. Whereas faith is the belief that God exists and will reward those who seek him (Hebrew 11:6), doubt is believing God is not, and that it doesn't pay to seek Him when a test or trial comes. Expressions of the sin of unbelief take the shape of the human viewpoint, shortsightedness, and the failure or refusal to see God in a given situation.

Instruction to Runners: “Run with endurance.” The idea of “endurance” is “to abide under, to wait patiently.’ This involves facing each morning as a new one and keeping in mind that there will be things coming along in the day to test and check our patience. By application, we need to view what would normally be thought of as an interruption as a divine intervention instead. ***A Word on Patience:*** Asking God for patience results in an indirect response to the request. He put us through a process (sometimes painful process), touching the nerves that are most sensitive. He then bears down until we finally get to the place where we endure the race with patience. It is all a part of the training process.

VI. FOCUS WHILE RUNNING (Hebrews 12:2)

Apart from a goal, a perspective, running is futile and meaningless. The writer talks with runners about their eyes, and presents them an example.

²(Let us fix)...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.

As runners... followers, our eyes must be trained on Him alone; we cannot yield to distraction. Why do so many people start the followship, begin the race, only to drop out or quit?

2 Reason For Failure:

1. **Focused on the wrong things** – We get our eyes on people (i.e. Following a preacher, or a person that we really look up in the church, a leader, etc. either in a good way or a bad way), situations and circumstances (i.e. problems, hurt feelings, struggles, trials, misunderstanding, miscommunication, angry words, etc.).
2. **Faith in the wrong things** - We place our faith in religion, or rites and rituals, or tradition, or morality, people, etc. and when they fail us in some way in life they become empty expressions and void of help we bail out.

2 Important Elements in Focusing:

1. **Our Eyes** – Verse 2 says “... fixing our eyes on Jesus...” The idea is that of looking away from all that would distract our attention and setting our gaze on a particular object... Jesus Christ. The focus is both internal and mental.
2. **Our Example** – Verse 2 tells us to not only fix our eyes on Jesus, but also tells us that He is “the author (pioneer) and perfecter of faith.” He is the originator of the race. For Him the starting blocks were the Incarnation, when at Bethlehem the race commenced. The race ended at the empty tomb, taking Him through both crucifixion

and burial. Leaving earth at the ascension, our living Savior perfected this life of faith. **Practically Speaking:** If we are to take the steps of faith, we need to say in the midst of a day, “Lord, right now I am weak and unable to handle (name the situation). You handle it for me... through me. I wish to have Your Spirit bring the power that’s needed to cope with the pressure I cannot handle right now.”

How to put this technique for a faith that endures in race into practice?: (In other words, what to do and how to do it)

1. **We must stare into His face in order to gain His perspective –**
2. **We must stare into His face in order to gain His hope -**
3. **Jesus Christ understands the race in its entirety –**
4. **As the author, He is the origin of this kind of faith-life that endures –** In other word, He know how it goes. He know the hurdles, the obstacles, the challenges that lay in wait; therefore, it is always better to follow Him, allow Him to lead us through it.
5. **As the perfecter, He completed it successfully -** He knows how to do it. He endured the cross, despised the shame, and triumphed in the end by sitting down **“sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

VII. ATTITUDE WHEN RUNNING (Hebrews 12:3)

We need not run the race with panic and despair over times like these that we live in. Encouraging his readers (runner), the writer of Hebrews said, **“...consider Him who endured... so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”**

2 Attitudes To Embrace in Times Like These:

1. **A Calm Mind -** Verse 3 says, **“... consider Him.”** We “consider” something when we “think it over, mentally weigh all of its facets.” We are to weigh Christ’s mental attitude, the mindset with which He faced the cross and unwarranted shame. I love Isaiah 26:3-4, **“³You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast (“stayed” NKJV, , because they trust in you. ⁴Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.”** In weighing our circumstances, we are to weigh Him into them as well.
2. **An Encouraged Heart –** The writer of Hebrews says we are **“...not grow weary and lose heart.”** No one has ever needed to suffer alone. No one has to give his all to the race without support. He is encouraged and refreshed by the One who **“...endured such opposition from sinners...”**