

Think it's impossible to believe it again. Amen.

Amen. Thank you, John, for leading us. We'll continue our praise by singing in Mission Praise number 494 for a closer walk with God.

Oh, for a closer walk with God, a calm and heavenly frame, a light to shine upon the road that leads me to the Lamb.

[16:16] We'll stand and we'll sing these words to God's praise in a moment. O Father, Lord, serve on with God, a calm and heavenly frame, a light to shine upon the road that leads me to the house.

When I first saw the Lord, where is the storm refreshing view of Jesus and His Word?

For peace to love, I once enjoyed How sweet and heavy still The day of death, A day in joy The world can never tell Return, O Holy Thou return Sweet messenger of rest Dear Dear■■■

The dearest side, the line of door, whate'er the time you be, and need to take it from thy door, and worship only.

O shall my home be close with one, from answering my prayer, so pure light shall mark the road that leads me to the land.

[19:51] We'll turn now to our scripture reading, and we'll turn together, if you have a Bible, to the book of Hebrews, a letter to the Hebrews. We'll read from chapter 11 into chapter 12.

So, chapter 11, verse 32. That's where we'll begin, and we'll read into chapter 12, verse 13.

Chapter 11 is a passage of faith, the hall of faith, that recounts all these biblical characters who lived by faith and died in faith.

And I want to just capture the essence of what he's saying there by reading the concluding part from verse 32 into chapter 12.

So let us hear God's word. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jethro, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

[21:26] Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword.

They went about in scoons of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, who commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

[23:03] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted.

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them.

[24:15] Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them.

But he disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight the paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Amen. May God's word be a blessing to you all. You have heard it. Before we come back to that passage, we'll sing again once more in Psalm 71.

Psalm 71 from verse 14 through to 19. But I with expectation will hope continually, and yet with praises more and more I will thee magnify.

[25 : 39] Thy justice and salvation, my mouth abroad shall show, even all the day, for I thereof the numbers do not know.

And I will constantly go on, in strength of God the Lord, and even thine own righteousness, even thine alone I will record.

For even from my youth, O God, by thee I have been taught, and hitherto I have declared the wonder thou hast wrought. And now, Lord, leave me not, when I, old and grey-headed, grow, till to this age and strength and power to all come I show.

And thy most perfect righteousness, O Lord, is very high, who hast so great things done, O God, who is like unto thee.

The psalmist praising God, faithfully holding fast to the God that has been with him from his youth, the God that will not leave him in his old age, and the God that he will proclaim to all those around him.

[26 : 53] So let us sing these words to God's praise, that I with expectation will hope continually, and will stand to sing. But I with expectation will hope continually, and yet with riches more and more, I will be magnified.

Thy justice and salvation, my mouth the God shall show, In all the day, for I live in all, In all the day, for I live in all, The numbers do not know, And I will constantly go on, In strength of God the Lord, And I know righteous■■■,

And I know righteous■■■, Preciousness in life, alone I will reward.

For even though my youth forgot, by me I have been taught.

And hitherto I have prepared, and hitherto I have prepared, the wonders love has sought.

[29 : 50] And no, Lord, leave me not when I o'er the unbeheaded drove.

Till to this age thy strength and power, to all to come I show.

On thy most perfect righteousness, O Lord, is there behind?

Who has so great things done, O God? Who has so great things done, O God?

Who is thy God unto thee? Amen. And we'll turn back to that passage that we read together.

[31 : 23] And what I want to focus on tonight is looking at verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are, of chapter 12. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.

And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, before the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let us briefly pray as we come to this passage. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word, and we pray that it would speak to our hearts this evening.

We pray that you would instill within us great faith, that we would hold fast to you and your promises, whether we are young or whether we are old, knowing that we cannot go to anyone else. So, Lord, we pray as we come to your word, give us a great expectation of what you can do with it, and what we can do if we hold fast to you for your glory.

[32 : 37] Lord, we pray, encourage us, keep us, watch over us and guide us in all things. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now, as we come to this passage, I just want to say and start off by saying I find it a great encouragement to read about stories about Christian believers from times gone by, those that maybe are still with us, those that are still with us that can tell these stories, and also by reading books that recall great people of great faith that maybe lived on this island or Scotland or even further.

They're hugely encouraging at times, and they can help us in our own personal faith. Reading books like Gleanings of a Highland Harvest, maybe some of you have read, or my granny had a small paper book that spoke about the men of Lewis and recounted great men of great faith.

But you can go to the Covenanters, you can go to the Reformers in Scotland, you can go to great men who trusted God in great ways, great men and women who spent their time in prayer with God each and every day.

Great witnesses of great faith that we can go to and recall for our encouragement. But I think even as an island and as a congregation here, we are so privileged to have a heritage that we can go back to in our own culture.

Of people who lived, people maybe we knew of, people maybe we had heard of, but lived great lives of great faith on our island, islands, even people that lived in our nation, in the highlands of Scotland.

[34 : 44] We can go to these stories, and we can reconsider them and recall them to inspire us, to spur us on. And that's what the writer to the Hebrews is doing here.

He's recounting the biblical heroes in chapter 11. Those who exercised and showed great faith in life, great faith in death. And he's not writing about them because they lived perfect lives.

He's not writing about them because they did nothing wrong. He's writing because of the great faith that they have. But I read from the concluding section of that chapter, because we read there about unnamed believers.

Believers which we can't allocate to a certain time or place. Believers which maybe the Hebrews that this letter was written to maybe knew.

Maybe they could recall these men that the writer's speaking about here. These people that faced the difficulties of the early church, the persecution of others that came into their lives.

[35 : 58] But he's writing this letter because he wants to encourage them. He wants them to be encouraged. And you may remember we touched on Hebrews a couple of weeks ago.

We looked at Moses and we looked at Jesus. And the Hebrew people were discouraged. And they were wanting to go back to their old ways. They wanted to go back to the ways that they knew better, the sacrificial ways.

That made more sense to them maybe. It's almost as if they're running out of steam. They don't know which way to go. Now in this new faith in Jesus Christ, they're not sure what the next step is. Maybe they're getting tired. They're thinking about going back. Their drive and passion for Christ is almost gone. It's as if they're growing cold in their faith.

And the writer here is here to encourage them. John Piper says about these people that they were settling into the world.

[37 : 00] They had lost their wartime mentality, that great fight that they had to put up with, just to stay alive. And they were starting to drift through life without a focus.

These people needed to be fired up again. They needed to be revived in their hearts. And he's doing it by bringing them back to these great men of great faith.

Remember these figures. But not only that. Remember where these great figures got their great strength from. And who they placed their great faith in.

In the Lord Jesus Christ. He's calling them to endure. To be faithful witnesses.

He looks, he brings them back and draws them back to recall these great heroes. These unnamed believers. The ones he has written about.

[38 : 06] And even the ones that are not written here. The ones that they could recall in their own minds. And we can do that too in our own lives. We can be encouraged by thinking back to those who set an example for us.

And boys and girls, if you get to read about these Christian believers that lived in Lewis, that lived in the Highlands, pick up the book and read about their stories.

They're usually quite easy to follow. But usually they put a huge emphasis on the great faith that these men and women had. The trust they had in God.

So what the writer here is doing is bringing them back. Great men of faith. Great women of faith. Great people of faith. Following after these men. That's the first point.

To follow after these great men. But all the time, these great men were following after Christ. They were following after Jesus. And that's their second point.

[39 : 06] Following after Jesus. So we're following after men and following after Jesus. So bringing them back to these figures.

He says there at the beginning, therefore. That's the clause of what he said. All these great men of faith, great women of faith. Start there.

Therefore. Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, every sin which clings so closely. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Firing them up and trying to motivate them in the light of their great faith, with the witnesses that went before them. And he's speaking to the whole church here.

He's not speaking just to one. He's not speaking to himself. Although it would have been encouraging to the one and to himself. His words say it is, since we are surrounded, let us lay aside every weight.

[40 : 14] Let us run with endurance. The race that is set before us. He's talking to the church. He's talking to them together. But even as he speaks to the church together, in a sense he's saying to them, you're not alone.

You're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. Those that I have spoken about, they surround you in everywhere you look.

Now as we come to this passage, we'd maybe be tempted to say that you would imagine these witnesses looking down from heaven upon us, witnessing our actions almost, to see if we would make the right choice or the wrong choice.

And that could be a hugely encouraging thing, but that could be a hugely debilitating thing as well, having these witnesses watching over you. But that's not clearly expressed in Scripture.

That idea isn't really found in Scripture. And all the commentators were clear to state that when I was looking up this passage. It's not that they are looking down on us.

[41 : 29] It is the example that they have set for each and every one of us. Their witness speaks to them. Their witness speaks to us today.

The witness that they left in their lives. And last week we almost had, well, we did have that. It was those that stayed behind for the testimony Ian McCritchie was speaking about his brother who faced great difficulties.

But we saw what he spoke about, great, great faith. But maybe we would struggle to think about how we would react in that situation. A witness to us of how we are to go on.

An encouragement to us to follow. Great examples for us. A great witness left to speak to us.

Testifying of great faith.

To encourage us and help us. To remember it's not always easy what the Christian faces. And often it is great difficulties that we are faced with.

[42 : 39] But in the sight of these difficulties these men, women, whoever it is you're reading about show great faith even in the face of what seemed impossible.

And they are described these witnesses as a cloud. a cloud of witnesses. And a cloud you can't you can visually see it but you can't grasp it.

You can't really hold it. So if together we cannot lay our hands on these witnesses they speak to us.

We can imagine their lives the witness that they have left for us in their stories but you know we can't lay hold of them.

But it's also a cloud because they are so vast in number. it symbolises a great great number a cloud of people a cloud that will be gathered up in the air to meet with the Lord we have in 1 Cthulhu but every time a cloud is mentioned in scripture it's a heavenly presence or a heavenly thing.

You think about the cloud that led them in the wilderness the cloud that came down in the baptism of Jesus the cloud that appeared at the transfiguration the cloud that hid Jesus in his ascension it's a heavenly thing and these forerunners that have gone before us are in a state of glory a heavenly presence they are a cloud of witnesses forerunners to us they have run their race but he's saying to them it's your turn now and everyone that has gone before us has run their race and to us tonight it equally says it is our turn it is my turn but as a writer to the Hebrews says really it is our turn together as a church to run this race and to run it in two ways is what he says to lay aside every weight and to run with endurance now if I was to ask the children here if you're going to run faster if you're going to run fat you're not going to put on a jacket you're not going to put on your wellies you're not going to take a big heavy bag with you you're going to cast off these things that would weigh you down you're going to put on your running shoes you're going to put on your shorts if you're going to run a race you're going to run a marathon you're going to prepare yourself for it you're going to make sure there's nothing that's going to hinder you to do it to travel farther fast we must travel light that's what the commentator

[45 : 31] Reagan says and the weight that's going to slow us down is our sins and he just does not normally he doesn't just speak of it as any sin he speaks of weight as a sin which clings so closely to us weights that is otherwise translated easily besetting things which come so easily to us and will weigh us down things that will slow us down but the pilgrim Bunyan's pilgrim progress he had a

weight on his back a burden that he had to carry it affected the way he walked it slowed him down it weighed him down and the sins that cling so closely to us in our lives whatever it would be it would be different for each of us they'll weigh us down they'll affect the way in which we walk they'll hinder us in how we run and that's what's good about coming to the

Lord's table as a Christian because we're told to examine ourselves and examine really how we're walking how we're running to look not physically but spiritually and ask is there any sins that are weighing me down is there things that cling so easily to me that just naturally almost stick to me that aren't good for me that aren't good for my life my faith my witness to others around me and you almost feel like Paul when he's when he's you feel his language in Romans 7 where he says oh wretched man that I am he's doing the sins that he doesn't want to do these sins are almost it's like they're easily sticking to him he wants rid of them because he knows they're hindering him but he knows that he's still in this body of sin and he knows that while we're living in this body there's always going to be sin that we need to cast off that we need to take off and that's different for each and every one of us and the way in which we walk is in many ways different for each and every one of us too we'll walk different paths in this life but we're not to walk individually from each other he's calling the church to walk together yes you're doing you're traveling your own path you're encouraging each other and be mindful of each other as you do so you're running together let us go together that is what he's saying we should never be separated from each other but he describes this faith this walk as a race it's something that's difficult in many ways it's not a walk to enjoy and that word race one of the comedians said it's agony it's where we get our word agony from and in many ways it's not a race a running race it's any sort of athletic contest it could be something like fighting something that you're battled with and yes it's hard

Christian life is hard and it can be difficult it can feel like a fight at times we're warring with the devil as we heard in the morning I fight that battle but he's encouraging them don't go cold don't grow cold don't coast along in your life he's trying to fire them up remember these people of great faith remember what they've done run strive together fight the good fight because you're fighting and running and enduring for something that is eternal everlasting out of this world something that you cannot comprehend!

and Christianity is not a call for us to do nothing and that's not always a comfortable thought to us you may say well I thought I was only to believe and yes we are we are to believe but it's not only to believe we are to place ourselves in all that we are in the hands of God to be instruments for his glory vessels for his good purposes to place our faith in him as those that went before us did to follow after these people who trusted faithfully in the face of all opposition who believed in the face of unbelief who honoured him when everyone else was mocking him because Piper again says that as soon as we believe we can very easily enter into a coasting mode we just coast along our hearts become cold

I'm a believer now but we enter into this almost unpassionate routine and the commentator brown expresses again a Christian must make progress a Christian must be making progress in his life and to do it together progress together be those people that are firmly fixed on Jesus Christ to be described I love this description in Pilgrim's progress again where the Christians are described as sturdy rogues sturdy because they're faithful sturdy and they're rogues because they do not follow the ways of the world they won't enter into the ways of the world they're casting off all their sins but they're firm in their faith sturdy are you a sturdy rogue for Jesus Christ tonight running the race striving and enduring to follow after this great cloud of witnesses that have all honoured the name of [51 : 54] Jesus Christ in the face of great difficulties what is our witness tonight what do we leave for others to follow are we an encouragement are we faithful to God in our private lives even are you feeling tired are you feeling cold are you feeling like you're coasting along maybe you're running out of steam maybe you've made a profession recently or in years gone by and you feel like you've not really progressed well let us run together let us come to this word that will fire us up like the two that walked on the road to Emmaus when they heard about this word when they met with Jesus Christ when they were pulled back to all the prophets that went before them it's like fire in their belly and they ran back to profess the name of Jesus

Christ let us run together let us endure together let us be faithful witnesses together before this world being sturdy rogues and it's not because we follow men but it's all because we're following Christ just like these figures did following Christ our second point all these heroes set the example by following Christ following the Messiah longing for the Messiah the great king that would come if

they were looking forward they were still looking to him that's what it says there in verse 2 looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated in glory at the right hand of the throne of God and you can put this so simply if you want to follow someone you imagine someone tells you follow me and they're in the distance the most simplest thing to do is keep your eye on him keep looking at him and if it gets misty or hazy you keep looking you don't start looking at other things it's so simple follow him follow him that's what

Jesus is saying to each and every one of us follow me follow me tonight that's what each witness is saying as well follow Jesus look to him because he is the founder and perfecter of your faith he is the one that has set the greatest example he is the source of your salvation he is the beginning and the end the one that elected you before the foundation of this world and the one that will sanctify you and bring you to perfection by the power of spirit to enter into his glory his work is good and perfect his work is final and complete he is the founder and perfecter of our faith together and surely he is our greatest example he is our greatest encouragement he is our greatest motivation he endured that cross not despising the shame of it knowing that there was a joy set before him that's why he endured it and surely we can say that Christ endured the greatest endurance he endured the greatest of sorrows the greatest of griefs the greatest of pains and the greatest of punishments more than any of us could ever bear but all that he endured all that he bore all that he went through was done in love for his people done in love for this cloud of witnesses done in love for his church done in love for you and for me he looked to the joy that was set before him he had come from the glory of heaven from being at the side of his father he knew what it meant to enter into glory and he gave that up in order that he would pay the price of our sin that me you his church and his people may come and equally know the blessing and the riches of being in glory with God to enter into eternal security eternal rest and eternal peace he had sight beyond this world and in many ways we are to look beyond this world to consider the things that we cannot comprehend but just unearth the little that is spoken about what it is to be in the presence of

God the great mysteries of heaven what would it be like if only we could comprehend it fully imagine if you could comprehend what it would be like to be in heaven fully imagine if that was revealed to us tonight I think our hearts would be completely changed to this world all our love would be redirected towards heaven to God to the lamb and I think we would struggle to remain here I think we would have such a longing and love to be in glory to be in heaven that we would struggle to remain here and we only get a glimmer of what it will be like but we get enough of a glimmer to assure us we get enough of a glimmer to detach ourselves from this world enough of a glimmer to have a longing to be there and enough of a glimmer to endure and to know that the present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that awaits us

Jesus leads the way Jesus is our greatest example and in many ways when we come to the cross we see his great love for us his great example his great witness of how much he loved you and me he did not walk away or abandon any of us he went through the greatest of sufferings that anyone could ever endure what suffering did he go through we cannot comprehend greater than anything we will ever know or understand and you think well why did he why did he come just because his joy was in his redeemed people his joy was in his bride his joy was in every believer his joy would be in this great harvest his joy will be to be with him and our joy will be complete to be in heaven as well there was a joy set before him he endured the suffering of the cross because his bride was part of that joy every believer was part of that joy that's why he endured it because you will be part of his joy you will be the one that will have your joy completely fulfilled as well if you trust in him to enter into glory to the unimaginable incomprehensible with thankfulness and praise for the cross for Christ for the lamb that was slain for you for the love that he had for you to praise his name with a great cloud the great heavenly hosts that are innumerable and your joy will be complete

[61 : 32] David Filson from Ligonier he wrote an article and he sums it up quite well when he thinks about the cross he says but what could have been joyful in view of the humiliating horror of the looming cross where was the joy in this looming cross and then he goes on to say for you and I are the rescued lamb laid across his shoulders you and I are the rescued lamb laid across his shoulders you and I are the lost coin that he found you and I are the prodigal son that he embraced you are the one that made his heart rejoice after all these accounts there's rejoicing you made his heart rejoice he says and you make his heart rejoice now you will make his heart and he yours rejoice for all eternity you will make his heart and he yours rejoice for all eternity what a picture the joy that was set before

Christ you are part of it and he endured the cross the shame of it for each and every one of us so we'll come in conclusion now the writer wants to encourage these believers look at these men how they lived their lives but look at Jesus Christ and he tells him to look at this great cloud of witnesses to run the race together as Jesus faithfully ran the race he endured the sufferings of this cross greatest example and then he says in verse 12 that's why we read to verse 12 therefore lift up your drooping hands strengthen your weak knees make straight paths for your feet what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed he's just saying come on come with me come with me in this great race of faith cast aside everything you don't need follow

Jesus Christ come to the scriptures be fired up by those who went before you read about the cloud of great witnesses whoever that is read about great faith it's worthwhile going back to read about these great figures whether they're in the bible or not to encourage us along the way but what will they say about you what will your witness be tonight it's not about us though really will they remember you and think he loved the lord he lived for the lord everything he did was for the glory of god he lived like someone that had compassion and love for others imitating christ what does our witness say into the world today what will our witness say when we are part of the great cloud of the innumerable saints in heaven when we enter into that joy to be with christ let us encourage one another let us run the race together let us cast off every sins let us endure looking towards men but also ultimately looking towards jesus and following him i pray these thoughts will be blessed to each of us this evening we'll conclude by singing the hymn my heart is filled with thankfulness 1209 mission praise my heart is filled with thankfulness to him who bore my pain who plumbed the depths of my disgrace and gave me life again we'll stand to sing these words in a moment my heart is filled with thankfulness to him who bore my name who loved the depths of my disgrace and gave me life again who crushed my curse of sinful rest and loved me with his side and brought his law of righteous best to cover upon my heart heart heart is filled with thankfulness to him who wants beside who loves my weakness with strength and causes tears to fly whose every promise is enough for every step my step my day

Jesus healing me with arms of love and crowning me with grace my heart heart is filled with confidence to him who reigns above whose wisdom is my perfect peace whose heavenly glory is high for every day eye the heart is given by the king so I will give my life my all to love and fall amen to include a word of prayer our father in heaven we thank you for your word we thank you for the example of the saints that have gone before us lord let us follow them in great faith stir up great faith in us put fire in our hearts for you lord that we would trust you in the sight of the impossible of the difficulties of life let us hold fast to all circumstances each and every day let us cling to you with arms that will not let go so be with us we pray in Jesus name amen!

[69 : 40] to us to be to me I to me! me!

to! do to be to !! shall be lented soul!

Yet watch thou me and then I shall be whiter than the snow!

love