

Chapel at NBC 9/02/2009

Text: Hebrews 12:1-2 (NASB)

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

My Theme: Jesus: My Model – My Life

Introduction: My fascination with Biblical combinations. Oxygen and hydrogen. Both gases. You can mix them and you have a gaseous mixture. But a spark will combine them and you have beautiful, life giving water. There is a difference between a mixture and a combination.

Three visuals:

### 1. The Faith Road. Hebrews 11

**Visualize** a powerful road running through the Old Testament into and through the New Testament. Hebrews 11 gives us a running commentary of some of the people who walked that Faith Road. We have heard their names and have studied their exploits from Sunday School days right into our college classrooms:

Abel, son of Adam; Enoch; Noah; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Sarah; Joseph; Moses; Rahab the Harlot; and on and on!

Heros of Faith. But the distinction is not always a happy one. There were those who died, who gave up sons to torture, who were hungry and cold, imprisoned, and deserted. The Faith Road exits the Old Testament unfinished, still waiting for the completion of God's redeeming promise. While these Heros of Faith were approved by God, they "39 did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

### 2. The Faith Destination. Hebrews 12:1-3

For most, if not all, of us, we first did real business with God because we were running in fear from sin and its consequences. I, for one, am so grateful for how the Holy Spirit used Preachers and teachers and Godly people to bring me to a place of true repentance.

**Second visualization:** picture yourself looking up after you finally yielded to God's calling and you gave your heart to Jesus. You think, "Wow! This is wonderful. I'm clean. My sins have been forgiven. I have a new life. In fact, I'm a new person. I was lost and now I'm found! I am on my way to heaven.

Alright, so what's next?

And the Voice of Scripture answers, "Now it is time to begin your journey toward the real purpose of your life." "The real purpose? I have just been born again. What else is there?" "The real purpose is to become like Christ. To recapture the very Image of God within you. It is time to get on the Faith Road, and the Faith

Road finishes God's redemptive goal for you and for his people."

You see, most of us, in our early dealings with God are so preoccupied with "the wages of sin" in our lives, have not given a real thought about anything else having to do with God's purposes.

- Tendency to get stuck because of seeing the wonderful experience of conversion as the end of God's aims for us.

"So," you say, rising from your experience of finding new life in Christ, "the Faith Road. Learning to be like Jesus. Reflecting Him to a lost world. Okay, where is the starting line. I can run this race. I have new legs – I have new lungs – I have wings. I can do this thing!!" And without much thought but a heart full of enthusiasm, off you go full speed ahead. But you just barely hear the Voice of Scripture telling you insistently, "the early going will seem easy, but do not be surprised at some of the conditions you will run into. . . ."

From Hebrews 12:1-3 The Message:

1-3 Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross,

shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

### 3. The Faith Mixture.

Early in my ministry, I was admonished (by whom, I have long forgotten), in my preaching I should "Prepare as though there is no help from the Holy Spirit, and Preach as though there is only the Holy Spirit." While that sentiment may be debated, certainly it moves us to understand the importance of the true mixture of personal discipline on one hand and the miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit on the other hand.

**Visualize** your more sober progress along the Faith Road. You come to a large area heavily overgrown with thick vegetation. As you make your way into that thicket, you begin to feel the leaves and branches and vines begin to catch on your arms, legs, torso. You slow until you are holding as still as possible. While there are some pinching and punching by the brambles, if you are motionless, the pain is at a minimum. The Voice of Scripture asks why your progress is lagging. "If I move it is more painful than if I hold still," you say. "Ah, yes," the Voice of Scripture seems to nod. You are in the Weed Patch of Acceptable Discomfort. You are surrounded by Circumstantial Sin."

Richard Taylor in the Beacon Bible Commentary follows Adam Clark in suggesting that verse one contains a special meaning. About the “sin that so easily entangles us,” we can read that to mean that all sin seems always ready to grab and hold, robbing our vitality and derailing us from finishing our race. Certainly, this is true. But something more may be intended. There seems to be some sins that are peculiar to our personal circumstances. These seem always near us. We try to move past them and they grab us. They seem to like us. Perhaps, we rather like them, as well, these Circumstantial Sins.

So you are entwined in the Weed Patch of Acceptable Discomfort. “What do I do?” You whine to the Voice of Scripture. “Watch!” The Voice cries. From the corner of your eye you see someone striding powerfully through the Weed Patch. In a moment He passes you, almost taking your breath away, and is almost out of sight. “What was that?!” you ask. “That is Jesus,” answers the Voice of Scripture. “What is He doing?” you ask, incredulously.

“He’s scorning.” “Scorning?” “Yes! He’s enduring the cross; He’s despising the shame; He’s scorning all the Circumstances that would keep Him from the joy before him and the throne at the right hand of God. He’s beyond all this circumstantial stuff, because He knows what His goal is.”

Keep your Eyes On Jesus. The Bible is not primarily a Self-Help Book to achieve Christ-likeness. It leads us to combine our personal discipline – our perseverance

– our patience – our preparation – with the miraculous power of Jesus to achieve the purpose of God in us. In some wonderful way, it is His doing, using our permission.

Galatians 3:1-6 (The Message)

1 You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a hex on you? Have you taken leave of your senses? Something crazy has happened, for it's obvious that you no longer have the crucified Jesus in clear focus in your lives. His sacrifice on the cross was certainly set before you clearly enough.

2-4 Let me put this question to you: How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God's Message to you? Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it? Did you go through this whole painful learning process for nothing? It is not yet a total loss, but it certainly will be if you keep this up!

5-6 Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving or because you trust him to do them in you?

Jesus is our Model. He defines what is meant by Christ-likeness. He alone, in us – by faith and obedience – can make it true and real.