

## “Who Do We Think WE Are?”

### **Scripture: Hebrews 11:29-12:3**

Graphic: mission statement, torture, persecution

Key Verses: 12:3 Consider Him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Theme: If we think that, as Christians, we are exempt from trouble in this world, we'll be disappointed church-goers. God calls us to live out our mission, running the race set before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus. To do that, we worship Him, reach out in mission for Him, and learn about Him.

### **1) Introduction**

- a) There comes a time or two in everyone's life when one simple question is either asked outright, or implied... Who do you think you are?
- b) For some of us, that question comes from deep within us when we are ready to step out boldly into something which we may not feel or be fully equipped to do – a new ministry, a new job, a new family...
- c) Other times, that question comes from someone else, as if to state, “You don't have any good reason to be here, doing this. You are not authorized...you are not worthy.”
- d) Often times the question comes when we are sticking our noses into places that we have not been invited to stick them...usually family situations, right?
- e) Sometimes, we think that we're entitled to more than we deserve...or maybe just a simple thank you for something we've done.
- f) Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't be acknowledged and thanked for our work...but WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE?
- g) Paul tells us in Romans 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with **sober judgment**, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
- h) And we love to play the comparison game, don't we? We compare ourselves to the Jones'...and we compare ourselves to the people at work...and we compare ourselves to the people on TV or on the internet...
- i) And we, as a culture, have formed an entitlement mentality that says, “I deserve to be wealthy, healthy, and wise.”

- j) Today, though, as we continue to track through the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> chapters of Hebrews, we'll find out that comparing ourselves to the saints that have gone before us makes us very humble, very quickly...
- k) And when we ask the question, "Who do we think WE are?" the answer can transform your life...can transform this congregation...if we have the courage to answer the question...
- l) Turn with me in your Bibles to Hebrews, chapter 11, starting in verse 29...
- m) Pray...

## 2) Scripture

- a) Now, last week, you'll remember that the author of Hebrews said that FAITH (the focus of this section) is the ASSURANCE of things HOPED FOR, and the CONVICTION of things not SEEN.
- b) And then our author went on to list out Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses...people that obeyed God BY FAITH and YET (and YET!) who died before the promise of receiving their reward for their faithfulness could be realized...
- c) These people, who died before they received their earthly reward, are GIANTS of our faith...
- d) And then our author goes on, in verse 29, to list out more people – more giants of the faith...
- e) **Read verses 11:29-40**
  - i) Verses 29-38 could be known as the roll call of the torture of the faithful! It starts out nice enough...people who got saved and who escaped harm and who won wars...
  - ii) But then starting in verse 34, quenching fires? Escaping the edge of the sword? ...starting to get warm in here...
  - iii) Verse 35 - People being raised from the dead...OK, that's good...
  - iv) People who were tortured, refusing to accept release...people being mocked and flogged...put in chains and imprisoned.

- v) They were stoned to death, sawn in two (! I love THAT one), killed by the sword, wore animal skins, were poor, persecuted, and tormented.
- vi) They wandered in the desert, lived in caves? And holes in the ground?
- vii) Who do we think WE are?
- viii) We sit here in a beautiful air-conditioned sanctuary, with nice clothes on our backs and shoes on our feet. We are extremely blessed!
- ix) I'm not saying these things are all bad...but who do we think we are?
- x) And even as I say that, there are some people here today who are suffering...some in ways the rest of us can only imagine...
- xi) I'm not talking about hangnails and hurt feelings...I'm talking about emotional anguish and spiritual crises...physical disease and pain...
- xii) And if this "roll call of the tortured" is any indication of the kind of life we're REALLY entitled to, then not only should we be spiritually prepared for struggle and hardship in life, but we should be preparing ourselves to invite more OF IT, for the sake of Jesus.
- xiii) Look at verse 39...Yet all these saints, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised – they did not receive the land flowing with milk and honey...they did not receive the abundant life without worry or pain.
- xiv) Why not? Because even though they might have deserved it in their martyrdom, God also wanted us to know that they are just like us.
- xv) The whole point of this section in the book of Hebrews is for us to understand that the awesome men and women who lived by faith and some even who died by faith, are just like you and me...
- xvi) And so who do we think WE are? We are like them! And they are like us...and God wants us to live like they did – faithful, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF INCREDIBLE HARDSHIPS WE MIGHT FACE.
- xvii) And our response to that sustenance from God is to serve him NO MATTER WHAT.
- xviii) And we don't do that ALONE and we don't do that without God's divine intervention in our lives...

**f) Read verses 12:1-3**

- i) Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, all the people we heard about in VBS this week (Gideon, Mary, Peter, Paul), people in your life, parents, grandparents, children...everyone who ever lived and died trusting Jesus Christ as their Savior form a CLOUD of witnesses around us.
- ii) And if you'll allow me to get mystical for just a minute, I believe, through the testimony of scripture and my experiences that all those people are surrounding us now, cheering us on as we worship, engage in mission, and as we learn more about what it means to be followers of Jesus.
- iii) And we are to lay aside those things which weigh us down – those burdens that Jesus asks us to lay at his feet. And we are to get rid of the sin that clings so closely to us...pride, lust, lying, cheating, gossip...
- iv) And let us RUN THE RACE that Jesus has set before us, looking to JESUS, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...
- v) You know, I'll admit, sometimes I stink at faith...I mean, so often, I'm tempted to trust myself...to be afraid...to rely on number one...as a pastor, I get suckered into thinking that I have to have faith all figured out...maybe some of you are like that too...
- vi) But JESUS is the pioneer (some translation say AUTHOR) of faith. I didn't invent faith, Jesus did!
- vii) And he's the perfecter of faith, not me! Not you! We don't have to have it all figured out...HE DOES! Isn't that great!
- viii) And it's for the joy of having us accept him as our Savior that he went to the cross to die for our sin!
- ix) And so who do we think we are? We are children of the King...we are born again because Jesus defeated death on the cross, through the resurrection from the dead...
- x) We are not slaves to the struggles in this life, but children of light that radiate out from the Christ who strengthens us through those struggles.
- xi) And not only Christ, but all the saints surround us to encourage us...

### 3) Application

- a) So the question remains: Who do we think we are?
- b) Well, the answer to that question is simple...turn in your bulletins with me to the inside, bottom of the first page, below the worship order...our mission statement is listed there.
- c) WE THINK that we are people who: seek to love the Lord God by introducing people to His Son Jesus Christ and helping these relationships to grow.
- d) Let's say that together (enthusiastically): "We seek to love the Lord God by introducing people to His Son Jesus Christ and helping these relationships to grow."
- e) THIS is who we think we are! And it's a great mission statement because it has three key elements that are necessary for us to BE followers of Jesus.
  - i) #1 – **we seek to LOVE GOD** – and this is expressed in worship, mainly. And worship is not just on Sundays, but at all times in all places...loving God means worshipping God.
    - (1) In running the race of faith, we must keep our eyes focused on the cross of Jesus Christ in worship. In considering "him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself," we stave off weariness and gain strength of heart (Hebrews 12:3, ESV). Looking to Jesus, we see that he has already confronted in the cross the sins that weigh us down. Christ has freed us. For that, we worship him.
    - (2) Looking to Jesus, we see that following his lead doesn't mean attaining worldly success but will demand sacrifice and selflessness.
    - (3) Looking to Jesus, we see there is resurrection for people who trust in his love.
    - (4) Looking to Jesus, we see that he himself has already run our path to perfection and now sits at the right hand of God, the Almighty. There he's graciously guiding our every step.
    - (5) WORSHIP!

ii) **#2 We seek to introduce ourselves and other people to Jesus** – this is how we share the Good News...this is our mission and outreach. This is us going to Haiti, going to Red Bird Mission, going to school, going to the homes of others, and going to wherever God calls us or sends us. It's also our support of other people who are going, like the Andersons, the Baers, the Abbotts, and many more.

(1) *And you cannot run this race alone.* You have to run with other men and women of the faith.

(2) Patrick Morley suggests that human beings are a lot like redwood trees. Redwoods grow for millennia and reach as high as 350 feet. Yet their roots run only six to 10 feet below the surface. The only way these monster trees can stand tall and withstand the crazy California weather is to grow close together, intermingling their roots. They make each other strong.

(3) No man or woman was meant to live as a lonely tree. To do so is death. We weren't designed to run the race of faith alone. Yet many choose to do just that. Earlier in the book of Hebrews, the writer pleads with his audience — and with us — not to attempt life in this world as a solo act. He writes, “[L]et us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:24-25a, NIV).

(4) The fruit of being in mission together in the race of faith is a spurring on, or a mutual inspiration, in the right direction. When you run with others, you'll get a loving smack on the back of the head when you're tempted to weigh yourself down with some worldly concern, and you'll receive encouragement and support when you're feeling entangled in some sin.

(5) MISSION!

iii) **#3 We seek to help relationships grow** – relationships with Christ, and with each other.

(1) This is discipleship. This is how we learn and practice being followers of Jesus. This is Sunday school, TLC groups, men's and women's groups, Disciple Bible Study, Lay Speaking courses,

ministry equipping schools, and so much more...we have to train on the truth of God's word.

(2) Running a race isn't something you just jump into. Not if you're smart, anyway. To be a successful marathoner, you have to go through rigorous training — preparing your body through diet and practice to take on the rigors of running 26.2 miles. The same is true in our spiritual lives.

(3) Training can be a beast. Training can be brutal, and God doesn't make it necessarily easy for us. Yet the Word of God is where we are trained in a life of *faith-racing*. Through teaching and learning Scripture, God reveals and redirects our steps. God gives us a pattern for living. But most of all, through Scripture God stirs up faith and strengthens our trust in Jesus Christ.

(4) In 2 Timothy, we are reminded that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV).

(5) Sir Francis Bacon once said, “Reading maketh a full man.” How true are those words when it's the living and active truth of God we're reading?

(6) DISCIPLESHIP!

f) Worship. Mission. Discipleship. Three legs of a stool, on which this church body effectively transforms the world and brings people into the kingdom...

#### **4) Conclusion**

a) Who do we think we are?

b) Well, that depends on WHOSE we think we are...

c) If Christ is Lord of your life, then you have a mission – Love God, introduce him to others, and help people grow in faith.

d) If there are areas of your life where Christ has been wanting you to surrender and you have not...today's the day. If there are hardships that you are facing that have, so far, overwhelmed you, lay them at his feet.

- e) We're going to take a few moments to pray this morning, and I want to invite whoever wants to to come to the front here and kneel, or however you are comfortable
- f) I'll invite people from the prayer team and some leaders to come and be ready to pray with you, lay hands on you, whatever God is asking of you today.
- g) As we sing, *Turn your Eyes Upon Jesus*, I pray that whoever has business to take care of with God today, that you'll take this opportunity.
- h) God doesn't promise us a struggle-free life, just an abundant life lived in the power of His Holy Spirit...he's inviting you to come...do not grow weary or lose heart...
- i) Let's pray...