

Hebrews 11-12
Cloud of Witnesses

It's good to be back as the "guest speaker" again. I appreciate having a place where I can share.

In around 25 days I will be heading back to Belgium for the whole semester.

I will be teaching three classes I have never taught before...

So, please keep me in your prayers.

I am excited, but also a bit nervous.

I want to do a good job.

I will try to send you guys regular updates.

Let's get going on the text for today:

[Slide]

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,
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.

Hebrews 12:1-2

This is a favorite text of mine.
Back in the 80's we sang this text.

This text is packed with great
messages...great preaching...

Since I am NOT a great preacher,
I am going to share something from
this text that...

So, let's see what we can find here.

First, the text opens with *therefore...*

When I was a young man I heard a
great preacher/teacher say this:

"When you see *therefore*
you need to find out what it's

there for."

[Slide]



That was Dr. Bob Marsh, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Dothan, AL. I sat under Dr. Marsh's biblical teaching for around three years. I also took OT and NT Survey from him in my freshman year at UCLA,

Wallace junior college.

AND...He also baptized me in the Choctawhatchee River north of Dothan right off Hwy 231.

Dr. Marsh passed into the next world on Christmas Eve.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so **great a cloud of witnesses**...*

What is the writer talking about?
Well, he just walked through the history of the Jews...
[the Faith Hall of Fame].

Men and women who lived faithful
lives...in the midst of great difficulty.

Some lived in the wilderness...like
Moses, Elijah...and David...

Waiting for God to open doors or
deliver them.

Some were tortured and killed...
And then another of my favorite
verses:

[Slide]

They went about in sheepskins and
goatskins, destitute, persecuted and
mistreated...

They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground...

the world was not worthy of them.

Hebrews 11:37-38

The chapter ends saying "none of these received their reward...only with us have **they** been made perfect."

Therefore...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...

The cloud of witnesses are those who have gone before us.

I consulted three scholars...(I respect all three)...they all agreed with my reading:

This is a mental picture of the coliseum where athletes would compete in front of the citizens... who there to cheer them on.

This is the language of the Roman Coliseum - gladiators, running races, chariot races...

So the writer of *Hebrews* is calling on us...those who are still living on this side...

and still running the race to live for
God against ALL odds.

We are to remember that those who
ran before us are now watching...
and cheering for us...to *RUN*.

[10 min]

This is part of what the early
Christians considered the
"communion of the saints."

Those who have run the race before
us are now cheering us on.

We are all running a race.

And each of us have a race that is
unique.

I have already mentioned Dr. Marsh.
Let me tell you about four others
who have run the race ahead of me.
[Slide]

Marshall Ables

Not sure Marshall
graduated from high
school, but he was a
solid mechanic.



He ran his own shop
in Tuscaloosa.

Marshall was the greeter at 1st AG
for years.

Some good friends of ours moved to Tuscaloosa and visited our church. A year later I was talking with Debbie, the wife with six children... I asked her what made them come back to 1st AG.

Her first response: Marshall Ables. "He was so kind to us on that first visit. He spoke to every child...then the next Sunday he called us by name!"

I had Marshall drop into one of my Exegesis classes when I was training interns.

He did not want to do it saying,
"Al, I'm not a preacher or really
smart..."

I told him that I just wanted him to
share his faith with my interns.

It was really good.

Simple...but moving.

After he left I told the interns that
head knowledge without the heart...
and the passion they saw in Marshall
is USELESS...a clanging symbol.

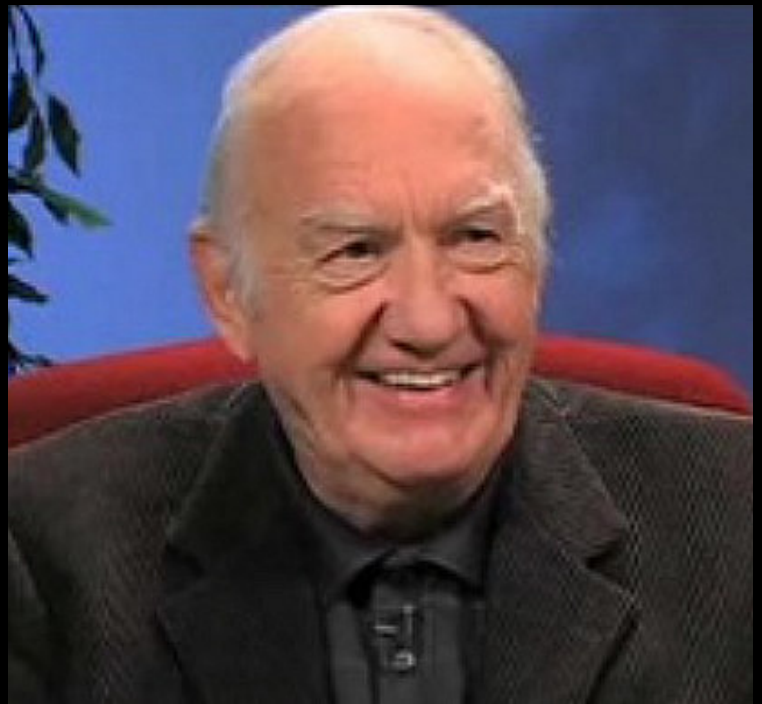
[Slide]

Lucille Cater - My grandmother.

Lucille lived her
life as a model
of being a
servant.
She didn't
preach...she
lived it.
And people
saw it.



[Slide]
**Professor
Gordon Fee**
He was THE
most famous



pentecostal - charismatic scholar
in the last 150 years.

I had the privilege of speaking with
him on the phone 3-4 times.

Gordon Fee served as the Editor-in
Chief for the NIV Commentary set
for 20+ years.

My last two phone calls came as
Dr. Fee was slowly passing into the
next world, he had alzheimer's.

He did not remember who I was, but
when I started asking him questions
about the dating of *Galatians*...buddy
he knew his stuff !

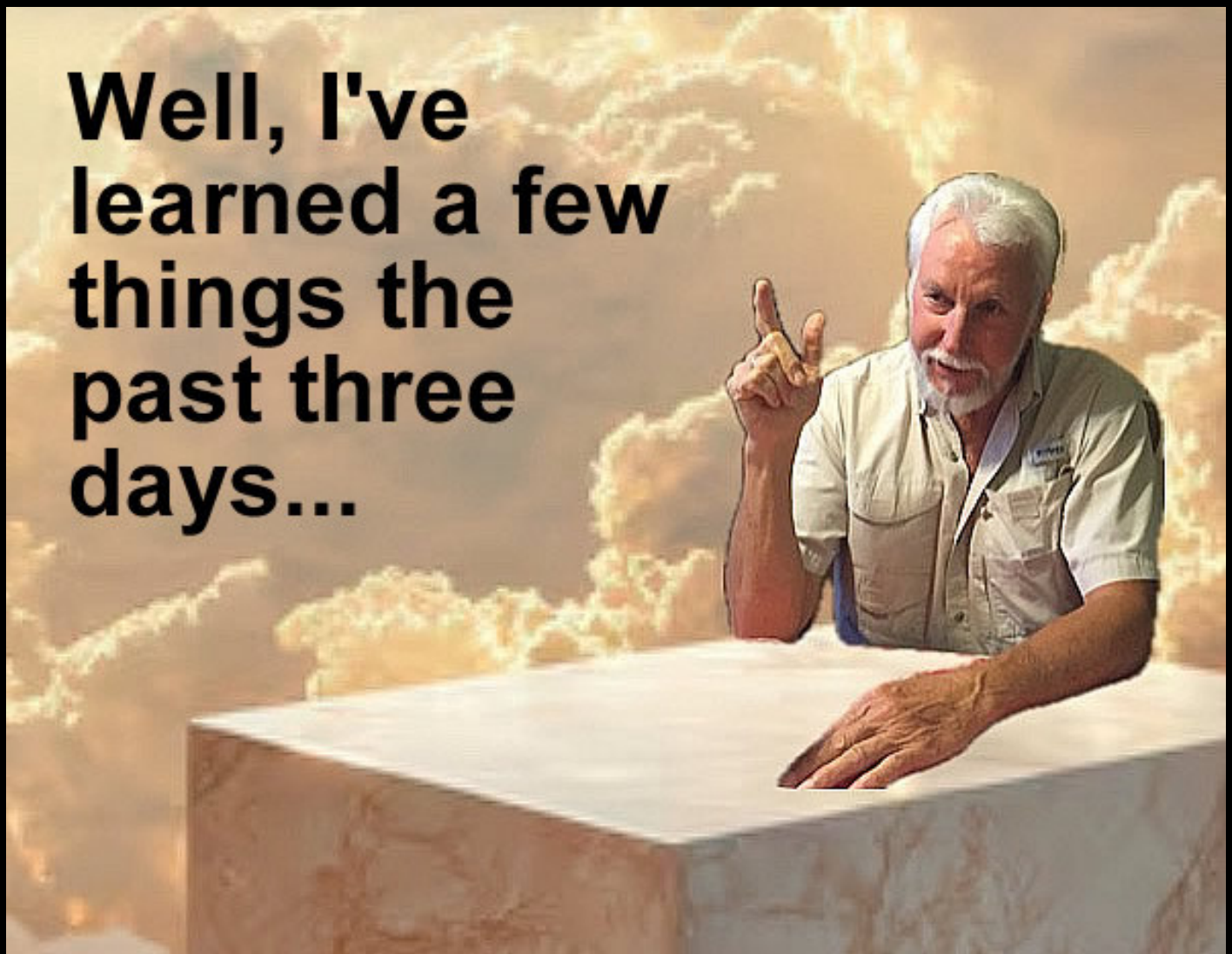
In ancient Christianity when a giant of faith passed a close friend would deliver a panegyric...a eulogy "to speak well" of somebody.

Larry Douglas Tharp

I want to honor Larry Tharp here today.

I struggled at first to become friends with Larry. Once I learned what made him tick...we grew close.

[Slide]



We all witnessed some of Larry's moments when he was not doing well, but I want to give you a view of the Larry...who tried to run his race.

After living a wreckless life for 40 yrs
Larry surrendered to Jesus...

He stopped his worst sinfulness
immediately...and never went back.

Prior to meeting Gwen, Larry would:
+ pick up every single hitch hiker he
ever saw. He would:

- share the gospel with them
- take them to get something to eat
- if he detected no drugs he would
give them cash

Larry was afraid of nothing.

The things he did and saw in

Vietnam - he looked death in the face several times.

+ More than once Larry gave me an envelop with a lot of cash to give to somebody.

I never looked, but I know from the recipients telling me later - it was more than a few hundred dollars.

Larry lived frugally...
and gave generously.

"You can't serve God without serving your fellow man."

+ Larry had a big heart for those who struggled.

When Jackie's brother, James Ray,
was struggling to believe that God
would forgive him...

I asked Larry to come with me to talk
with James Ray.

I stood 15ft from them and just
listened...

It was truly God speaking through
Larry.

Jackie, what did James Ray say to
you?

I like to remember people who ran the race before me...and in some way handed the baton to me.

Like Dr. Marsh

Like Marshall Ables

Like Lucille Cater

Like Dr. Gordon Fee

Like Larry Tharp

This is what the writer of *Hebrews* is doing - urging us to run the race... like those we have seen, or know about from the past, those who have already run their race.

[20 min]

We are being asked to do two things:

1. Run the Race with Endurance
- that means keep running in spite of the hard parts...the times when it is NOT easy...KEEP Running!

I just spoke with a young man who has recently started running his race.

In the context of our conversation he had voiced to me that he needed to get into better shape.

He mentioned that he was going to start working out...and trying to run.

When we got to his spiritual life he admitted that he had slacked off in the last several months.

He asked me, "What should I do?"

Well, I used his own words about working out.

To grow spiritually...

To run the race that is set before you
Requires EFFORT.

If you just wander into church on Sundays...and that's all you do...

I can promise you,

You will not be spiritually fit.
So I laid out a simple plan for him
that he agreed was do-able.

Read one chapter each day.
Start in the gospel of *Luke*,
then read *Acts*.

He said, "Well, I need to think about
it so I can understand it."

My response:

"No, right now you just need to know
what it says. Figuring out exactly
what it means, will come later.

You just need to get it inside you."

Pray.

Don't try to pray a certain amount of time...just talk to God.

Cultivate a relationship with God.
He knows what you are thinking, but
YOU need to voice it.

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So the writer is calling us to do two
things:

1. Run the Race with Endurance.
2. Hand the baton to Others.

That is what I was doing with this
young man...URGING him to RUN !

+ + + LET'S PRAY + + +