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JUNE 2017

HOW TO BE INDUCTED INTO GOD'S HALL OF FAME

Greetings church- those who are blessed by the Best and praying for the rest! Yes and amen!

Before we get into this month's teaching, let me give you a quick update on the Dickerson's:

Levi just turned 10 and completed 4th grade! Can you believe it? Time flies when you're having fun! He is really growing, in more ways than one...

He just completed playing spring baseball and now is playing in a junior PGA (golf) league. So, of course, he is growing up physically. But what is the most exciting thing to me is how he is growing spiritually. Just to be honest with you, it kind of surprises me to see how well he absorbs spiritual things at his age. Even at such a young age, I have seen him take on a leadership role at our church in various ways. I have also seen him growing in both his understanding of spiritual truth as well as becoming more and more generous.

Shannon is also doing really well. She has really been growing in her ministry giftings and has done a great job leading the women's ministry at our church. She is an excellent pastor's wife too. One compliment I have heard of Shannon time and time again is how she just follows me so intently while I'm preaching. One thing's for sure- Shannon loves her men (as she likes to say)!

As for me, I have recently been pressing into the Spirit through prayer. I have been reminded by the Lord of just how important it is that I spend a concentrated amount of time praying in the Spirit and in praise & worship. It has really made an impact on me of recent as well as the atmosphere around me.

Friends, never underestimate the power of your fellowship time with the Lord. For several years early on in my life as a Christian, whenever I would ask the Lord about any need in my life, His response was always "Spend more time with Me." It didn't matter whether it was seeing freedom from the flesh or seeing some other natural form of provision, He would always draw me back to fellowshiping with Him. It is for this reason that I believe wholeheartedly in the fruit of fellowshiping with the Lord.

So do yourself a favor- carve out some extra time in your personal life to pray in the Spirit and to worship the Lord. The fruit you will experience in your life as a result will be well worth the time you invest. And I believe, like the Lord told me so many times, this will hold the answer to whatever your current need might be. Amen.

Well, as for this month's teaching, I want to share with you an encouraging message which I have entitled "How To Be Inducted Into God's Hall of Fame."

THE HALL OF FAITH

When I say "God's Hall of Fame," I am obviously making reference to that very famous chapter in the Bible where God lists the heroes of faith from history, Hebrews chapter 11...

Many of us are familiar with the content of this great chapter of the Bible. In this chapter, we find what many have deemed as "God's Hall of Faith." A number of those who walked on this earth and excelled in the arena of faith up until the time of Jesus are mentioned as a memorial to their walk with the One whom their faith was in. Then chapter twelve begins with... *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."* (Hebrews 12:1)

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Let me first say that a good rule of thumb to go by is whenever you see the word “therefore” you need to find out what it is “there for.” And the answer to that question will always be found in the preceding verses. So, in this case, the author is referring the reader back to the long list of entries into God’s Hall of Fame that he just finished mentioning in chapter eleven.

You see, many believers just assume the author of Hebrews changed subjects with chapter twelve verse one, but the truth is that chapter twelve is just a continuation of the thoughts of chapter eleven. Man is the one who divided the Books of the Bible into chapter and verse, not God.

So what the Holy Spirit is trying to communicate in this first verse of Hebrews chapter twelve is how we too can be inducted into God’s Hall of Faith! In other words, how we can have our life of faith chronicled in the annals of heaven like these other patriarchs. Isn’t that awesome!?!

This is why the author follows up the word “therefore” with the words “we also”... It was as if he then wanted to point his audience away from the saints of old and for them to then focus on their own walk of faith. You see, the Holy Spirit wanted these Hebrew believers (and us) to understand that we too can be recorded in God’s Hall of Fame just like these Old Testament saints were!

Just think about that a minute: if someone was going to give you the key to getting into God’s Hall of Fame in just one sentence, don’t you think you would pay close attention to what they were going to say? Of course, you would! Well, that is precisely what the author of Hebrews is doing in chapter twelve and verse one...

You see, sometimes we have a tendency to put these Old Testament saints up on a pedestal, thinking that they had some special faith and anointing that we do not have, but that is not true! The truth is that what we have under the New Covenant is far greater than what they had under the Old Covenant. We are the ones with the advantage! We are the ones who have become partakers of God’s divine nature through the new birth! We are the ones who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us to teach, guide, and empower us!

So, it is not that they had any more potential than we do. **The difference between those listed in Hebrews chapter eleven and us is that they did more with what they had available to them than we have done with what we have available to us!** That’s just the truth of the matter. Yes, we are all capable of being world changers just like these men and women of faith were to their generations. And the key to making this kind of impact on our generation is in fulfilling the admonitions that are listed in this verse in Hebrews 12:1.

So now let’s move on and take a look at some of what the author had to say in the rest of this powerful verse and find out how to also be in God’s Hall of Fame of Faith...

FOLLOWING THE CLOUD

Then after he says, “Therefore...” the author of Hebrews then added in the phrase- “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.”

This is a very important phrase for us to understand because in it lies two great truths that will help us on our way to being known as a great person of faith...

One of the points that the author of Hebrews was communicating to his readers by using the word “since” in this phrase is that we should use the lives of these Old Testament saints as lessons to build our own lives upon. In other words, as the author states later in his epistle, we should follow their faith- considering the outcome of their conduct (Hebrews 13:7).

And let me throw this little nugget in here- I believe it is no coincidence that the author uses the word “cloud” to describe these great examples we have in the Old Testament of faith and failure...

Do you remember what God used to lead and guide the children of Israel through the wilderness and into the promised land? You got it- He used a cloud! **So just as the children of Israel were given a cloud to lead them through the wilderness, we have been given a “cloud of witnesses” to lead us into our promised land!** Amen!

You see, according to a couple of New Testament Scriptures, this is one of the greatest benefits that the Old Testament holds for us...

Romans 15:4 tells us, *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”*

Notice here what the Apostle Paul says about the Old Testament Scriptures: He says they are for our “learning.” In other words, we should let the lives of the Old Testament saints teach us so that we can glean patience, comfort, and hope. For example, we should read the stories of Abraham, Joseph, and Lot and see how they all came out winners in the end although they went through times of waiting on the promises of God and enduring difficult circumstances. This should bring comfort and hope to our hearts because we know God is no respecter of persons and that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Of course, this would be learning from the Old Testament’s positive examples.

On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 10:11 tells us that we should learn from their failures as well... In this verse, the Apostle Paul says, *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages has come.”*

We are told here that another purpose of the Old Testament is that we should learn from their mistakes. The particular reference being used here is of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Their negative examples of unbelief, murmuring, rejection of authority, etc. are definitely worth being admonished by because those mistakes are what will keep us out of our promised land just as they kept them out of their promised land.

So you see, the Old Testament was passed on to us so that we can learn from their failures and be encouraged by their faith. It is for this reason that we need to study the Old Testament as well as the New Testament because in it lies the wisdom we need to be successful in our race of faith. If we fail to utilize these lessons from God’s people, we are simply being foolish. Why? It is because **a fool will only learn from his own experiences, but a wise person will learn from another person’s experiences.**

Let’s be wise, saints! Let’s strive to learn from the faith of the members of God’s Hall of Fame and let’s strive to learn from the mistakes of those who failed to win their race of faith!

THE ARENA OF FAITH

Not only is the phrase “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” the Lord’s way of pointing us back to their examples but it is also very enlightening because with it the author begins to paint a picture of what our earth-life is likened to from the perspective of eternity...

Let’s begin to establish this by first taking a deeper look at the word “cloud”... The Greek word used to translate “cloud” here was used in ancient Greek manuscripts to describe the “upper-deck seats” in the Roman arenas of that day. It was because of the uniqueness and magnificence of these Romanesque superstructures that these upper-deck seats were called the “cloud seats.”

Keeping this in mind, notice that the author also said that we are “surrounded” by this great cloud of witnesses

(or as the original King James Version says, “encompassed about”). By using this word “surrounded” the author of the Book of Hebrews is painting the picture of this heavenly arena as being similar to the well-known Roman Coliseum of his day. He is describing a stadium that is enclosed and that is, all the way up to the “cloud seats,” filled with the “great witnesses” that have preceded us to heaven.

So if these great saints are the ones filling the grandstands that overlook the competition, where do we fit in the picture? You guessed it- we are the ones competing in the middle of the arena! That is why the author goes on at the end of the verse to say... “let us run with endurance the race set before us.”

You see, we who are on this earth, are the current competitors in the arena of faith! We are the ones that are now in the middle of the track where the race is being run! What an awesome picture this paints for us, amen!?!

This life that we have been living on the earth is our track. This is why the Apostle Paul said at the end of his life- “I have finished my course.” In other words, what Paul was saying was that he finished the course where his race of faith was being run.

And we too have a course, church! God has prepared beforehand good works for us to walk in (or in this case “run” in) (see Ephesians 2:10). We all have a track that God has laid out for us to run our race of faith on, and on that track lie hurdles that we must overcome as well.

I believe another reason God used this analogy of a race in relation to our life of faith is because races are only temporary. They may last anywhere from a few seconds to a few hours but even the longest of races are still rather temporary in comparison to the rest of the runner’s life. And that is what our life on this earth is like in comparison to eternity, saints! **Our life in this body is like a 90 second race in comparison to a 90-year life!**

Oh, that we would see our life on this earth in this light! It would change everything! It would change the way we treated people. It would change what we did with our money. It would change how much attention we paid to the things of this world. We are just running a temporary race now, and soon and very soon, we will be able to enter the rest of the grandstands of heaven along with all of our heroes of faith!

You see, we only run when we are anxious to get to a certain place or when we have an attraction that is stimulating us, right? **So by using the word “run”, the writer of Hebrews then presupposes that our hearts are eagerly set upon the finish line.** Let me give you an example of this that has always meant so much to me...

Any person who is very familiar with horseback riding could tell you that when they take a horse out of its stall for someone to ride that it tends to be a little sluggish. The horse will not be incredibly motivated from the point that they lead it out of the stall until it gets to the halfway point. But when they get that horse to that halfway point where it is headed back to the stable, they will have to pull back on the reigns to get that once lazy horse to slow down and keep from running. Why? Because it knows that it is on its way home!

This is exactly why the Apostle Paul admonished us in Colossians 3:2 to set our minds on things above! **It is because if we direct our hearts towards our heavenly home, then we will run our race with more enthusiasm and zeal!** You see, the condition of our hearts and where we set our minds will determine the speed in which we run. (see Philippians 3:14 & 1 Corinthians 9:24) So be it for us!

THE QUEEN OF ALL VIRTUES

In closing, I want us to pay particular attention to the manner with which the author of this powerful verse says that we are to run this race that is set before us... He exhorts his readers to “*run with endurance...*”

My friend, if there is one virtue we need in our race of faith it is this virtue of endurance! The reason we need endurance is because the race that we are running is not a sprint; it is a marathon. In other words, we are running not just for a year or two; we are running for the rest of our lives! And the reality is that we are all, at some point in time (and probably many times), will be tempted to slow down, faint or give up. It is during these trying times that we need this virtue more than ever.

So let's take a closer look at this word "endurance" since it is so important to running our race of faith...

The word "endurance" comes from the Greek word *hupomeno*. This Greek word is a compound of the words *hupo* and *meno*. The prefix *hupo* describes being under something and the word *meno* is translated "abide" many times throughout the Scriptures. This word *meno* also means "to stay, remain, dwell, or live." So, when you combine the words *hupo* with *meno* you get the picture of someone who has the supernatural ability to *remain under* a situation. In other words, the person possessing this virtue has what you would call "staying under power" when they are under a lot of pressure to give up. And although "endurance" is the closest English equivalent to the meaning of *hupomeno* you could also translate it as "patience or perseverance" (as a matter of fact, the Greek word *hupomeno* is translated "patience" almost every time in the King James Version).

You see, during the First Century, *hupomeno* was one of the most esteemed virtues of the early church. As a matter of fact, the First Century church called *hupomeno*- "The Queen of All Virtues."

In fact, "endurance" was as greatly desired by the early church as faith, hope, and love! Today we spend more time discussing the virtues of faith, love, joy, and peace, but if you could go back and listen to the heart cry of the First Century Christian, you would see that "endurance" was one of their greatest desires. Why, you ask? It was because in the beginning of the church age, believers were intensely persecuted- to the point of being demanded that they deny the Lord Jesus or be executed. And they knew if they possessed this one, single virtue, they could outlast the fiery trials that they were suffering and be more apt to endure their tribulations. It was because of this view of "endurance" that the early church affectionately deemed it "The Queen of All Virtues."

And although we in America generally do not experience that kind of high-level persecution, endurance is still needful for other parts of our race of faith. For instance, when we stand on God's Word for the things that He has promised us, we have need of this patience so that we may receive the promises (Hebrews 10:36). Back in Hebrews 6:12, the author tells his audience that we are not to become sluggish but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherited the promises. Now I want you to notice that it is not just through faith that we inherit the promises, but it is through faith *and patience* that we inherit the promises according to this Scripture!

You see, in the original Greek language that the New Testament was written in, the words had genders. And in this particular instance, the word used for "faith" was masculine and the word used for "patience" was feminine. So the best way to understand this is to think of the conception of a baby... **Just as it takes the seed of a man and the egg of a woman to conceive and give birth to a child, likewise it takes faith and patience to conceive and give birth to the promises of God.** In other words, faith alone will not do it just as a man's seed by itself will not create a child. Faith has to have something to sow into, and that partner is patience! Amen!

Saints, we must understand that when we find a promise in the Word of God and we decide to put faith in that promise, there is going to be a waiting process to see it manifested in our lives just as there is a waiting process for a child to be born. Many would "amen" that, but it is not a revelation in their hearts. The reason I can say this is because when most believers find a promise and latch onto it, they start out persuaded, expectant, and

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excited about it, but after a year, a month, or even just a week there is not that same persuasion, expectation, and excitement. The reason for this is *not* because there is necessarily a deficiency of faith in most believers; it is because there is a deficiency of patience in most believers. It is by faith and patience working together that causes us to finish our course and win our race.

The most common question these believers ask is- "I have been believing God for many years for such and such. Why have I not seen my answers yet?" What they need to understand is that God does not operate on the same timetable that we do.

For example, in 2 Peter 3:8 we are told that a day to the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. So when we pray for something God looks at it like- "Alright, the answer will come in 15 minutes." In our time-frame, that would be something like 10 years, saints! Do you see how our timetable is totally different than God's?

So, to grow faint after a couple of weeks would be like saying, "Well God, I have been believing you for this thing for fifteen whole seconds. I'm tired of waiting. Maybe it's not your will or maybe you just don't love me enough to answer my prayer." Many Christians would not verbally express it like that, but that is really what they are communicating through their actions.

Church, we need to have this "hang-in-there power" working in our lives if we are going to receive the promises and finish our course. It is so vital for us to possess this virtue because the enemy's ultimate goal is to get us to quit. However, the good news is- the only way that we can lose our race is by quitting! Those that "endure" to the end will be saved!

So, let's quickly review the keys we have discussed this month to being inducted into God's Hall of Fame...

- ✓ First of all, we need to follow the faith and learn from the mistakes of those who have run this race of faith before us! By using their examples, we can keep ourselves from stumbling over the many unnecessary hindrances and hurdles that will pop up on our track.
- ✓ Secondly, we need to recognize that our life on this earth is only a temporary race in comparison to eternity. We must set our hearts and minds on the finish line and on the prize in order to run our race with more purpose and passion.
- ✓ And, last but not least, we must let "the Queen of All Virtues" become active and rule in our lives because we all will have temptations to quit or just become sluggish during our race. Possessing this "staying under power" is what will keep us on our course and, subsequently, cause us to win every single time!

Of course, there were other truths in Hebrews 12:1 that I did not have time to include in this edition of the Living Logos but, God willing, I will discuss these other keys to winning our race of faith in an upcoming issue.

So until next month, the Lord fill you up with the knowledge of His will. The Lord cause you to look to the finish line and unto the reward. The Lord infuse you with His strength- empowering you to stay on track and finish your course. Amen!

Victoriously,

