

OLD UNION MINISTERS SCHOOL

2022 SESSION

LESSON TITLE: A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

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Lesson Text: Hebrews 11:1- Hebrews 12:3

Hebrews 11 tells us of those who by faith obtained a good report, some having even endured bitter persecution. Chapter 12: 1-3 reads: *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with **so great a cloud of witnesses**, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

With what we are told in Hebrews 11 along with these verses I read from chapter twelve, I would like you to consider two of the things we really need to see in this:

1. We need to live by faith.
2. We need to know our history.

The aim of this lesson is to encourage the study of our spiritual ancestors. To show how important it is to gain as much knowledge as we can of the history of God's people. However, not only to know historic facts, but to be greatly influenced by them as well.

1. A man named James R. Beller wrote a book entitled: America in Crimson Red. He expressed this very thought in the introduction

of his book by saying: "No historian is able to give facts alone. I say the historian cannot hide his heart, for if he does he becomes the reason the reader is disinterested. I cannot divorce myself from the fervor of our historic testimony. I pray you will feel the same. I knew what I wanted from the experience of our five years of research. **I wanted the testimony of our forefathers to transform my own life. I wanted to thirst for God like them, to preach with fervency like them, and for God to use me in like fashion. I also wanted to search for our distinctives and discover how our people maintained them through the years.**"

Do you believe the Hebrew writer only wanted us to know that there were in fact people from the past such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and others who had great faith in God, or do you also believe he wanted us to be motivated by their faith?

Is it not reasonable that the more we learn about the great zeal with which God's people served him in the past, the greater our zeal should be to dedicate our lives to His service?

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, ***let us*** lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and ***let us*** run with patience the race that is set before us.

The most important instruction given to us in this is that we are to look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, to consider Him as our greatest example!

I'm thankful for the great cloud of witnesses referred to in Hebrews 11. The Hebrew writer spoke of people who lived in Old Testament times. Some he mentioned by name. He spoke of others by simply calling them the prophets, women, and others. It is my belief that

throughout time there has been an ever increasing, **GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES**! The New Testament scriptures also speak of those who exercised great faith in God, and, who gave their all, in service to Him!

In Acts 15: 26-27, Paul and Barnabas are spoken of as men who **hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Revelation 12:11, tells of those who **loved not their lives unto the death.**

In Philippians 2: 25-30, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians concerning a very sick friend named Epaphroditus , **who for the work of Christ was nigh unto death**, not regarding his life, to supply their lack of service toward him.

They lived their lives by faith, believing that the cause of Christ was more important than their own lives. They were not dissuaded by persecution, or imprisonment, or illness. They marched on as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, despite all these hardships. **Are we like them?**

In Acts 20: 22-24: Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus: *And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, **neither count I my life dear unto myself**, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

I'm confident that all of you here today are familiar with the men and women spoken of in the scriptures who lived by faith. And though there are no writings that equal the Holy Scriptures, I'm also thankful for the record we have of those who have lived beyond those times. How familiar are you with the history of those beyond Bible times, those whose names we don't find recorded in the scriptures?

A Baptist preacher named Robert Baylor Semple, was born January 20th, 1769 in Rosemont Virginia, and he died in Fredericksburg Virginia Christmas Day, 1831. He was saved in 1789 and united with Upper King and Queen Church. He was ordained September 26th 1790, at which time he became pastor of Bruington Baptist Church. He served Bruington Church as pastor until his death, his pastorate lasting a little over forty years. (His mortal remains are resting in the Bruington Cemetery awaiting the resurrection). Among many other accomplishments, Brother Semple published a book in 1810 entitled, History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia. I want to share with you something he wrote concerning the suffering of our Baptist brethren when America was yet a young nation.

He wrote an account of four preachers in 1771 named William Webber, John Waller, James Greenwood, and Robert Ware. There was a warrant for their arrest. They hadn't stolen anything, they hadn't killed anyone, or been guilty of any other type of mischief, the warrant was issued because they were preaching. They were offered a plea bargain, stop preaching and you will be set free. They refused and were sent to prison. Semple said the prison swarmed with fleas, they borrowed a candle from the jailer, sang praises to God, gave thanks they were just in a prison and not in hell, had prayer, then laid down and went to sleep! (Page 34).

They were not deterred. They gave notice they would preach every Sunday and Wednesday. The persecutors found that the imprisonment of the preachers tended rather to the furtherance of the gospel. They preached regularly in prison; crowds attended; **the preaching seemed to have double weight when coming from the jail!** (Page 35).

Semple wrote: All their persecutions, combined with their other exertions, could not materially retard the progress of the Gospel. **The**

work went on. New churches were constituted, and young preachers were raised up! (Page 383).

A Baptist preacher named Lewis Peyton Little wrote a book entitled, **Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia**. In his book he referenced the imprisonment of John Bunyan in England, who had been put in prison for having held worship services and preaching, which was considered unlawful for him to do. He was threatened that he would be banished from the country, and if he didn't leave, he would be hanged. This was his response: **If I am out of prison today, I shall preach again tomorrow, by the help of God!** Our Virginia Baptist preachers were very much like John Bunyan for they, too, were men, that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He wrote of Samuel Harris, Lewis Craig, Elijah Craig, John Waller, James Ireland, and James Read, to name but a few, as men who were whipped, dragged off the stage while preaching, beaten, and jailed, but they continued to preach the gospel!

If you're thankful for the religious freedom you have had throughout your ministry, you really need to be aware of the great role the men of that time played in obtaining it.

Lewis Peyton Little said: In the continued and uninterrupted use of any great blessing we are prone to underestimate its value and minimize its importance. This is especially true with reference to that inestimable boon, "RELIGIOUS LIBERTY." There is an inclination, on the part of many, to enjoy the fruit of the tree without even looking up to see whence it came.

James Ireland spent 5 months in the Culpeper jail. The day after his release, he went to work on a petition addressed to the man who was then the Governor of Virginia, secured the signature of several

respectable inhabitants of Frederick and Culpeper counties, embarked on what was then a long journey from Culpeper to Williamsburg to present the signed petition to the Governor. His request was that he be given the freedom to build a meeting house in which to worship God, and be allowed to preach without being molested, by the grace of God his request was granted in writing by the governor. He still faced trial, but he now went to court with ammunition that proved to be effective, and the door of Religious Liberty for the Baptists in Virginia began to open.

Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, said to be the oldest Baptist Church in Allen County Kentucky, was organized in 1801. I want to share with you something from the history of this church. March 13th 1886—Resolutions adopted by the Bethlehem Church in Allen County Kentucky, Whereas Rev. John H. Spencer has succeeded in publishing the history of Kentucky Baptists from the first settlements of the said state to the year 1885, being over an hundred years which has been greatly desired by the denomination for more than half a century, and with a view of making known to Elder Spencer our appreciation for his zeal and untiring energy in so noble an enterprise the church adopts the following resolutions:

1st That we congratulate Elder Spencer on his success and hereby tender to him our thanks for his energy and perseverance manifested by him for the past nineteen years in procuring, preparing, and publishing said history.

2nd That we endorse said history so far as it has been examined and recommend it to the Baptists everywhere as correct and a history of great interest.

3rd That a copy of these resolutions be forwarded to the Western Recorder for publication, a copy forwarded to Elder Spencer, and a

copy entered on our church book to show the appreciation we have for Elder Spencer, for being the means of laying before the readers of said history many items of the history of the pioneer Baptists of the state, that would have been forever lost to the present and future generations. Done by order of the Church at the March meeting 1886.
E. H. Read (Clerk) T. J. Ham (Moderator) Pro Tem.

As for the earliest Baptist preachers in Kentucky, several of them were those who came here from Virginia. In J. H. Spencer's History of Kentucky Baptists, he said at the close of the year, 1780, there were one licensed and five ordained Baptist preachers in what is now the large and populous State of Kentucky—William Marshall, Joseph Barnett, John Whitaker, Benjamin Lynn, James Skaggs and licentiate John Gerrard. If there were any others it is not now known (Page 18). It wasn't long however until they were joined by others, Lewis Craig moved to Kentucky in 1781, William Hickman in 1784, Ambrose Dudley in 1786, etc.

Several of those who came to Kentucky finished their course here as well. May God richly bless the memory of such a "GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES!