

*Ready for Your Next Pastor* Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews 12:1) Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2) keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3) For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up.

Today offers an opportunity to do something that many preachers never get to do. Let's look back to the first sermon I preached here at First Baptist Church Lafayette on **May 26, 2019** – "***How to Get Ready for Your Next Pastor***". I proposed that one of most vulnerable and dangerous positions for a church involved transitioning from one pastor to the next. Some of you may have thought it strange that I would offer that challenge as my first sermon. "*How to Get Ready for Your Next Pastor*" might be more appropriate for one of my last sermons. Here you are today, two weeks away from welcoming Dr. James Pritchard as your next senior pastor. However, ten months ago I could look ahead and see this moment in time. What I could not know at that time was the length of the journey and all of the details of the journey in the search for a new pastor, but I knew from past experience, that if you could accept the challenge on the front end of the journey to get ready for your next pastor, then the day would arrive when I could confidently pronounce you **READY FOR YOUR NEXT PASTOR**. Well, congratulations! That day has arrived! **March 29, 2020** – "***Ready for Your Next Pastor.***"

So, for our time together this morning, allow me a look back to that sermon, and let's evaluate the journey, utilizing the same biblical text I used ten months ago: Hebrews 12:1-3. On May 26, 2019, I challenged you to take three looks which would get you ready for your next pastor.

1. **LOOK AHEAD** — ***The Race Is Forward.*** The author of Hebrews defined the Christian life as a race to be run. However, we can make the connection and application of truth to any life-situation as a race to be run. Verse 1 answers three questions about this race we will run.

- "***Run the race that lies before us.***" What kind of race is it? – *the race that lies before us*. Most of our life-races are marathons instead of sprints. In a sprint, the fastest runner wins and the slowest runner loses. But in a marathon, those who endure to the end finish the race. Ten months ago I told you that this

part of the race for First Baptist Lafayette involved transition. I stated that you did not know how long you would be without a pastor. I encouraged you to remember that God is in control. I confirmed to you that God already had your next pastor selected. I encouraged you to remember that God would meet all of your needs during these days between pastors just as He had always done. As you've run this race, look what God has done! He has led you to the James Pritchard family.

- **“Run with endurance.”** How must we run this race? *“With endurance = hupomone = “a patient, steadfast waiting for.”* We live in a day of quick solutions and short turnarounds, but races like these require patience and perseverance. I warned you ten months ago that unlike a sprint, a marathon presented plenty of opportunities and temptations to quit or drop out of the race. I also admonished you that during these days of transition – everybody needs to be faithful and everybody needs to stay committed. Here's a direct quote from that sermon: *“The greatest gift you can give your next pastor is that when he comes, the church is moving forward, not backward.”* Well, congratulations! You have finished the race! You have endured to the end, which has now become a day of new beginning! You have remained faithful and committed! And the Pritchards are coming to a church that is moving forward, not backward! I want to commend the Pastor Search Committee for a job well done – for finishing the race. I want to commend all of you for not getting discouraged during these months of transition.

- **“Run surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.** Where do we run this race? – *Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.*” We use the word “cloud” to describe those white, puffy, marsh mellow shapes in the sky or doing business on the Internet. But the Greeks applied “cloud” to describe the highest seats in the bleachers of a stadium. Literally, these words of encouragement remind us that *“You're not alone! The grandstands of heaven, all the way up to the clouds – the highest seats in the bleachers – are filled with people who have run this race ahead of you!* Another quote from my earlier sermon – *Perhaps the greatest challenge is that you've not done a pastor search like this in 61 years!*

I've been interim pastor fifteen times, and I'm still amazed and thrilled and excited with the result. Wow! You've done it! You looked ahead and now you have finished the race. Now that you have finished this race, you are about to start another race. So, keep looking ahead, running the race that lies ahead of you with endurance, and know this, that the same cloud of witnesses are cheering you on as you begin this new race.

2. **LOOK WITHIN – Examine Your Own Commitment.** Back to that first sermon, I surmised that in this marathon race together, the things that often hinder us are not outside of us but within us. Sometimes, we are our own worst enemy. What stops us short so often is our own hindrances. I challenged you to look

within and examine your own commitment. As you looked within, two actions were essential:

- **“*Lay aside every weight.*”** In the first century, athletes wore weights to enhance their training. Even today, runners sometimes train with weights attached to their ankles. But runners don’t run the race with the weights strapped on. When it’s time for the race, the weights come off. In the same way, we must throw off everything that hinders us. I remember saying a year ago, *“I don’t know what may hinder First Baptist from being all that God wants you to be. It could be attitude. It could be control. It could lack of commitment. It could be complacency. It could be an unwillingness to change. Whatever it is, each person must be willing to lay aside everything that hinders, and do it BERORE your next pastor arrives”* And it’s obvious that you have done that – you have laid aside those weights and prepared yourself for the new journey.

- **“*Lay aside the sin that so easily ensnares us.*”** The author of Hebrews does not identify the sin that so easily entangles us. In the chapter preceding Hebrews 12, Hebrews 11 defined and described faith – the phrase *by faith* is used twenty-one times in chapter 11. The strong implication points to our Faith enabling us to persevere and endure through times of crisis and transition. So, the sin that so easily entangles Christians might well be the sin of Unbelief. Time after time after time, the Bible speaks to us of people and nations and churches who fell short of victory for one reason and one reason only – lack of faith – unbelief. The amazing takeaway about unbelief in the life of a Christian and a church, is that it tangles up everything else. The only person who can do anything about your unbelief is YOU. Again, you have demonstrated great faith during these days of transition. Thanks for looking within. And could I just challenge you do keep looking within and resolve to keep laying aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares you.

**3. LOOK UP — *Keep Your Eyes on Jesus.*** To “keep your eyes on Jesus” describes an *attitude* of faith and not just a single act.

**Jesus = Perfect Example of Perseverance:**

- **He is *the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.*** He is the originator and finisher of our faith. (Wiersbe, p. 323) He is the source and the goal of our faith. (Hobbs, *Hebrews: Challenges To Bold Discipleship*, p. 123) He is the Alpha and the Omega – the first and the last. (Revelation 1:17)

- **He lived *the joy set before him.*** The most amazing insight about Jesus defined His greatest JOY in life as living in the will of God. He literally enjoyed doing the will of the Heavenly Father. I’m convinced that’s why Jesus desired that His joy be completed in us. (John 15:11).

- **He *endured the Cross – despised the shame.*** To be crucified was not

only the most painful method of death in the first century, it was also the most shameful – reserved only for the worst of criminals. For the Romans and the Jews to crucify Jesus meant that they thought he was equal to the worst of criminals. In all probability, Jesus was crucified naked, as were all other criminals. How shameful is that!! But in order for Jesus to be our Savior and our Redeemer, he endured the shame and the pain of the Cross – for us!

• **He has sat down at the right hand of the Father.** Jesus received the same glory after completing His assignment that He possessed when He was sent to Earth. The *right hand* of a King or Ruler is the position of honor. Our Lord earned the right to occupy the position of honor because of His endurance. Ten months ago I posed this question: “*Is God’s will for you a joy or a burden?*” I asked that because when you begin a journey and the outcome is not yet in view, it is so easy during daily struggles to get tired, to withdraw, and to give up. It’s so easy to lose your joy during the journey. I’m so proud of you for not losing your joy during this journey. You will never know how much of a blessing and encouragement you have been to Vicki and me. Nearly every week, someone would say to me, “*Thanks for coming to help us.*” “*Thanks for giving of your time and experience as our interim pastor.*” I can tell you that this journey has been a joy, and not a burden. And I can say that because you looked up and you kept your eyes on Jesus.

**Your Future is NOW!** Today is a day of pronouncement. A pronouncement is different than an announcement. To announce is to give advance notice. To pronounce is to officially declare. So today, I declare you **READY FOR YOUR NEXT PASTOR.** “Hear ye, hear ye – First Baptist Lafayette is ready for their next pastor!”

#### **THANKS....**

- For running the race with endurance
- For looking ahead, looking within, and looking up
- For staying together during the journey
- For paying attention to the things that matter in the church
- For stepping up and keeping the church moving forward
- For creating a new future for First Baptist Church
- For making these past ten months a joy and not a burden.
- Your courage, your resiliency, your faithfulness, your endurance, have been a rich blessing to me, a remarkable testimony to the city of Lafayette, and a praise offering to our heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- **WELL DONE!**

