

Text: Hebrews 12:1-3

Theme: We've Got You Surrounded

August 14, 2016

In the old westerns that were popular on television, it was common to see the good guys surround the bad guys and then say, "Come on out now. We've got you surrounded." The implication was that the bad guys didn't have a chance, that they had no choice but to come out with their hands in the air. In today's text, the writer of Hebrews uses a similar phrase, but with a very different intention. As we look at the faith examples provided, we focus on those familiar, comforting words, "We've Got You Surrounded."

I. The examples of faith provided in our text assure us that God has us surrounded in a good way. A. Since we're surrounded, let's take a look at the examples that surround our faith-life. 1. We're surrounded by Abraham, the example of an immovable faith. If you're looking for someone who stood on their faith in the midst of unbelievable circumstances, Abraham is your man. Without a word of criticism or an argument, Abraham offered up his only son. Imagine the courage, the incredible faith it took to bind his son to the altar. There, in the person of Abraham, we're surrounded by an example of an immovable faith, a faith that would not shrink though pressed by many a foe.

2. We're also surrounded by Moses, the example of a committed faith. Moses' life didn't exactly start out on the right foot. From day one, multiple people wanted him dead. Later, there were those reminders that haunted him for life as he realized that so many others had died, yet God had spared his life. Around every corner, Moses had to make a choice. Would he follow or would he go his own way? If you had been in his shoes, how would your life have turned out? Would you have maintained his commitment when everything in life seemed against you? To carry on today, it's good to know we're surrounded by the faithful, by one like Moses.

3. As we add to our list, we're surrounded by the people of Israel, a unified faith. Imagine the Red Sea event. Pharaoh's army is at your heels and in front of you is an enormous body of water. Suddenly, the waters separate, and, as a united whole, the people of Israel, step into the Red Sea with no assurance that what they see at the moment will last until they arrive at the other side. Yet, with a harmonious faith, they cross to the other side. Today, the people of Israel are our example of the value of harmony in the faith. We need each other; we need to stand together, to move together, to be on the same mission and the Red Sea event surrounds us as vivid evidence.

4. We're surrounded by the city of Jericho, a persistent faith. March around the city and go home; do the same thing tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. Would you have done it? Would you have believed God was going to do something that amazing if only you were persistent? What God said, the people did with persistence not knowing what God would do or when He would do it. A faith that will not give up when everything seems against us, we need that kind of faith in our hearts today and the tumbling walls of Jericho are there to surround us and provide the encouragement needed to press on when all things seem against us.

5. We're surrounded by Rahab, a non-restrictive faith. Rahab, a prostitute, numbered among the faithful who surround us? Who even wants to be connected to such a woman? If someone said to you, "Look at the faith of Rahab," would those

words even register as important? Rahab is our assurance that God is not like us, that anyone with any past can enter into a faith relationship with the Creator of the Universe. You might look at Rahab and think, “Don’t want to be associated with her,” yet Rahab is one of the bold, one of the daring, one who risked her life because of her faith. Today, we’re surrounded by the faith of Rahab and that’s a good thing.

B. Since those great men and women of faith have us surrounded, what do we do? 1. We lay aside everything that could slow us in our race. Notice what the writer of Hebrews says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight.” Did you catch that tiny word “also”? The faithful that surround us, they, too, had to lay down what slowed them down before they could become our witnesses. Following in their footsteps, our God says, “Look through your life. Find everything that could impair your race for the crown. Pile it in a heap and discard it.” Following their example, it’s what we do.

2. We run the race set before us. Rahab, Abraham, Moses, did any of them run the same race? Those great men and women of faith, they each had a very different race to run, and each ran their race with endurance all the way to the finish line. Aware that we’re surrounded, we step onto life’s track and we run the race specifically marked out for us. We don’t look at someone else’s race, launch an all out complaint that God is being unfair, nor do we dream of what it would be like if only our race were different. Since we’re surrounded by such great examples of faith, we do what they did. We run the race set before us.

3. We focus on Jesus. What’s the opposite of focused? Those who surround us, did they allow the stuff of life to distract them or find themselves on continuous detours? Those men and women were on a mission to arrive, to receive their crown. What about you? Are you on a mission or merely enjoying the scenery? Are you focused on Jesus, on His forgiveness or complaining about someone or something? Because we’re surrounded by such impressive examples, examples that say, “You can do it. You can cross the finish line and receive that glorious crown that’s far beyond your expectation,” we focus on Jesus and we run until we cross the finish line.

4. We run with endurance. Suppose Moses had said, “I’m as good as dead so I might as well give up now.” Or Rahab saying, “My past is beyond forgiveness. There’s no hope for me.” Or Abraham saying, “You’ve asked too much of me. I can’t do it.” How would their lives have turned out? Would they be in that great cloud of witnesses or long forgotten as failures? Without endurance, without perseverance, those great men and women would have become nobodies. Where are you at today? Enduring and persevering or somewhere on the sidelines claiming defeat? Running with endurance, it’s the only way to run, the only way to obtain the coveted crown.

5. In the old westerns, “we’ve got you surrounded,” was a statement of defeat. But when it’s Abraham, Moses, Rahab, and the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea on dry land, the greatest statement we can hear from them daily is, “We’ve got you surrounded!” Amen.