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Confirmation – Hebrews 12:1-3 – What Kind of Witnesses Do You Need?

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I hear this every time Examination and Confirmation day comes: we have to do *what* in front of all those people? We have to answer questions? We have to make promises?.. with all those people just staring at us? What if we mess up? What if we forget? Everyone’s going to see!

I understand where you’re coming from. I’ve been there, and so have many of the rest of these people here. My dad made me walk home from church on my Examination day because I was talking too much. Four miles or so in my nice clothes and new dress shoes! Not fun, but I got through it, and you’ll get through it too. See, it might make you anxious to see all these fine folks and know that you have to be on your A-game and your best behavior, but the truth is, without these people, there would be no reason for us to be here. That’s because Confirmation is something that needs to be shared together; it’s something that needs to be done publicly because it’s all about *witnessing*. It’s about all these people serving as witnesses for you, and it’s about you being witnesses for them, too. So the question we’re going to answer today is this: what kind of witnesses do you need?

As our text says, “*we are surrounded by... a great cloud of witnesses*” – lots and lots of witnesses, some you can see and some you can’t; some here right now, some here in spirit. Those *witnesses* are meant to remind you of the truth and what’s good and right; they’re meant to remind you why you’re doing what you’re doing and why it’s so important for you for now and for eternity. Well, there’s one witness our text mentions that makes everything you go through here and for the rest of your life worth it: it’s Jesus himself. He’s the most important witness you need, because without him, we’d be nothing and all this would be pointless. He’s the one who loved you so much that he came here to be one with you. He’s the one who didn’t let the shame or pain of the cross keep him from saving you. He’s the one who will never leave you or forsake you, the one who lives to always be with you and never let anyone snatch you out of his hand. He’s your motivation, he’s your example, he’s your strength, and he’s the most important witness you’ll need for the rest of your life and for eternity.

But that’s not all. He also gave you other witnesses to encourage and support you. Just look around. All these people here today who maybe just made you feel nervous, are actually one of your Savior-God’s greatest gifts to you. In fact, not just the people here, but even Christians dating back to the beginning of time – they’re just a little further down the path than you are, that’s all. Stories of people you read about in the Bible, stories of people you’ve heard about in class and at church – these people are examples, witnesses just for you that the most important thing in this life isn’t this life at all. It’s your relationship with Jesus, your faithfulness to his Word, and your hope for heaven, and nothing can get in the way of that. So hear today the chorus of the whole Holy Christian Church of every time and place, “Don’t give up! Keep on running! You’re right on track!”

But then remember the witnesses Jesus has put into your lives directly, too. Your parents, your grandparents, your fellow church members, whether you know their names or not – look around you! These are people who thought enough of their Lord to prioritize your spiritual education. These are

people who continue to stand firm and hold faithfully to Scripture and solid Christian teaching, even when it’s not popular anymore. These are people who give generously of themselves however they can, even as their own bodies and lives may be giving out in the meantime. These are people who give you an awesome example of Christian faithfulness to emulate, people with whom you should be proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder through this life, and people that you will share heaven with one day. Yes, it might be nerve-racking – and we all know exactly what you’re going through – but it is a blessed privilege to do this today among all these people, because these are the kind of witnesses that you need – witnesses that will walk together with you step-for-step and help keep you on the straight and narrow path of life until you finally make it home to Paradise forever.

The kind of witnesses you *need* are the kind of witnesses you *have* in your Savior and your fellow believers – ones that give you strength and encouragement every step of the way. But then remember also that Confirmation isn’t just about what you’re getting; it’s also about what you’re giving. So as you make your promises here today, consider too what kind of witnesses you need *to be*.

See, just as you need a strong example and encouragement from others, there might come a time when your example and encouragement will be just what someone else needs, too. So as our reading says, “*Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.*” If you’re running a marathon, you don’t want to be wearing anything too heavy or anything that could bunch up or get in the way or keep you from running as fast as possible. So as you run the marathon of life, don’t get lazy in your spiritual lives. Don’t get into the habit of making excuses not to be here in God’s house. Don’t get sidetracked by this world’s temptations. I know there are a lot of cool video games out there and any number of ways to waste time on TV and the internet – and the temptations and distractions only multiply as you get older – but don’t let any of that get in the way of feeding your faith and staying committed to serving Christ. “*Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,*” the text says. Yes, it will be hard. Yes, life will get complicated. The devil’s too smart and too cunning and crafty to let you go through your life without a few bumps in the road. Life will be hard sometimes, but remember, this is a race marked out for *us* – we’re a team, and we’re in this together. When times get tough, lean on your Lord and your fellow Christians, and look for ways to support the people around you when life is hard for them.

And most of all, let us “*[fix] our eyes on Jesus.*” That’s the kind of witness you need to be more so than anything else, because nothing is more important for our lives now and in eternity than that. So stay in God’s house, stay in public worship, stay in the Means of Grace. Remember that that’s where you get your strength, that’s where you get and give encouragement with your fellow believers, that’s alone where you can stay targeted on the Truth, and that’s where you get your hope for heaven that overcomes anything that would challenge it. So don’t grow weary, don’t lose heart, and don’t let the promises you make today turn out empty, because that’s not what your Savior-God wants or what’s good for you in the long run. No, keep your eyes fixed on Christ and keep your faith focused on Christ, because just as he finished his race and sat down at the right hand of God, he promises he’s got a place reserved just for us when we finish ours one day, too. Then whether you live your faith or die for your faith, either way, you will *have* the witnesses and you will *be* the witnesses that you need and that your Lord Jesus wants. God grant it. Amen.