Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Conquering, Courageous Faith, Part 2
Scripture: Hebrews 11:32-40
Code: 90-389

Well we have the opportunity tonight to look again at Hebrews chapter 11....Hebrews chapter 11. We have come to the end of this great faith chapter. It is monumental for a number of reasons. It is a monumental case laid for a relationship with God based on faith and not works. It is monumental as well because it gives us a kind of summary of the Old Testament. It kind of sweeps us through from the family of Adam all the way through the prophets which brings us virtually down to the New Testament. It is somewhat like the sermon of Stephen early in the book of Acts where he summarizes the history of God's working in Israel. Here similarly there is this summary, the emphasis is on the necessity of faith to have a true relationship to God.

Let's read the verses that we'll be looking at tonight. Verse 30, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith, Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient after she had welcomed the spies in peace. And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection and others were tortured not accepting their release so that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were tempted. They were put to death with the sword. They went about in sheepskins, in goatskins being destitute, afflicted, ill treated. Men of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith did not receive what was promised because God had provided something better for us so that apart from us they would not be made perfect, or complete."

Now as you know, if you've been with us and if you haven't, I'll try to give you enough of a summary to catch you up, the Holy Spirit in this wonderful epistle to the Hebrews is making a concentrated effort to convince the readers and anybody else who will read this through history, of the necessity of faith as the only way to God. There are only two possibilities. Either you come to God by faith alone, or you don't. Fair enough? And if you don't come by faith alone, then you come by some other way and you're left with some form of works system. You either are saved by faith alone apart from works, or you're saved by some degree of works. The Bible rejects all works as a way of salvation and leaves us only with the concept of faith. Faith is believing what God has said simply because He has

said it. And in particular, believing Him about what He says about a relationship to Him, that it is available to those who repent of their sin and put their trust in His grace and His mercy.

Even in the Old Testament people to be saved had to acknowledge their sin and then come to God and plead for the mercy and the grace which He promised to offer the penitent sinner. At any point in redemptive history, salvation is always by that kind of faith. Even before the cross they were believing God that He would give forgiveness, and mercy and grace to the sinner who repented and believed in Him. Even though they did not yet know the reality of the cross. On this side, our faith embraces the work of Christ in His death and resurrection but it is still faith.

Now here is the dilemma. In the New Testament period, as you know, the gospel breaks on the scene in Israel. Most particularly it is antithetical to the religious establishment and the established religion. Judaism by the time of our Lord and really long before that had become a works system. It had been embellished with all kinds of manmade rules by the hundreds and people were under the illusion that you work your way to God. It's not apart from faith but it's faith plus your own efforts. You believe in God, you believe in what God has said, but that doesn't complete the transaction. You have to accomplish certain things, achieve certain things, morally, spiritually and even ceremonially.

When the gospel of grace and the gospel of faith came along, the Jews heard it as if it was an alien message because they had been so well trained on works. To come along with this idea that salvation is by faith alone and that reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sin and entrance into the Kingdom of God and the hope of eternal heaven is a matter of faith and nothing more, seemed to them to be a corrupted message. They were convinced that your works and keeping of the law, therefore a kind of legalistic system, was the way into God's Kingdom. And so, when the gospel came along, they were offended by it. And the more invested they were in the works system, the more offended they were and the most invested were the leaders of the system in Israel and therefore they were the most hostile to Jesus and the gospel of grace and faith.

Well, of course, the New Testament unfolds the significance of salvation and reconciliation with God by faith alone. There are still some Jews who are having trouble getting the point. And the writer of Hebrews understands that because this letter is written to a community of Jews, presumably somewhere in perhaps in the land of Israel. It is to show them that the way of faith is not an alien message, it is not a new message, it is a very old message. To be reconciled to God, you must abandon your works and you must come by faith alone. Faith willingly admits inability and comes to God believing that He is merciful and will save the penitent sinner who believes in Him and in His grace and mercy.

Now how can the writer of Hebrews prove the point that salvation has always been by faith and never by works? Answer, go back to the very beginning of redemptive history, a biblical history of human

history and look at what we find.

He starts with the family of Adam in verse 4, and talks about the faith of Abel. And then in verse 5, the faith of Enoch, two familiar characters in the early chapters of Genesis. Still in the early chapters of Genesis in verse 7 he talks about the faith of Noah. Still in the early chapters of Genesis he talks about the faith of Abraham and gives a rather extensive treatment to Abraham's life. And then he talks, starting in verse 20, about the faith of Isaac. And in verse 21, about the faith of Jacob. And in verse 22 about the faith of Joseph, those are the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. And they take up the book of Genesis.

And then you come in to the book of Exodus and he refers to the faith of Moses. And, of course, Moses' story sweeps through the book of Exodus. Moses then also becomes the author of the Pentateuch, the opening books of the Old Testament. Then he comes, having left behind the patriarchs in Genesis and Moses in the book of Exodus, and the rest of the Pentateuch, he moves to the next group starting in verse 30. This group of people moves us into the book, if you will, Joshua and Judges and begins the trek through the books of history and the Old Testament. And he points out here that by faith the walls of Jericho fell, by faith Rahab, you remember the harlot in Jericho, was not terrified by the threat against her life if she hid the spies, but believed in the true God against very, very challenging potential circumstances.

And then he moves on from there to what we're going to look at today in verse 32 and following, and that's where we left off. Here we sweep through the...basically the history of the Old Testament all the way to the end. We start with the Judges, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah. We touch on the kings, David. We touch on the first of the prophets since Moses really, Samuel. And then we sweep through the prophets with just an identification of the prophets and then following that there are all kinds of statements made about the kind of suffering that they endured and in every case their faith stood the test.

So, the point of the writer is to show us that redemptive history has always made clear that salvation is by faith. The intensity of the chapter is starting to ramp up, however. When we look at Abel and Enoch and Noah and we look at Abraham and we look at Moses, we look at Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, we look at the children of Israel, at the walls of Jericho, we look at Rahab, there are significant events going on in which they demonstrate their faith.

But when we get in to chapter 11 verse 32, there's a level of intensity that is added because their faith is now tested in the crucible of a life and death situation...a life and death situation. And what I read you from verse 32 to verse 40 indicates that this is life and death kind of faith. This is where faith is tested at its highest level in the crucible of severe threats.

Now backing up a little bit, before we go in to the text, years before this letter was written, the gospel of Christ had come to this group of people. We don't know how many years. We don't know what group of people it is. It's a group of Hebrews, obviously. But years before the letter was written and we don't even know who wrote the letter, the gospel came to this group of people. And if you go back to chapter 2 and verse 3, we learn there how the gospel came to them. Verse 3 of chapter 2, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard."

In other words, this gospel was given to this community of Jews by the people who were with Jesus. This is a first-hand, eye-witness account of the gospel passed on to these people. And they weren't just people who were with Jesus, verse 4 says, their testimony was accompanied by signs and wonders and various miracles.

Now who would they then be? Who would the preachers be? Well according to 2 Corinthians 12:12, signs and wonders and miracles are the signs of an Apostle. So here is a community of believers who have been with Christ, who have been commissioned by Christ, who in fact are the Apostles of Christ, who have come to this community of Jews and preached to them the gospel of Christ and the preaching has been attended by signs and wonders and miracles and manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit. These people then were the recipients of a powerful presentation, to be sure. Some in this Jewish community, wherever it was, this Jewish town, some had believed. Some believed and opened their hearts and received the message of the Apostles and received Christ as Lord and Savior. And we can even assume that their...their experience with the Apostles was after the cross and after the resurrection. So they heard the full message of the New Covenant gospel. Some of them believed it. Some of them fully, genuinely embraced it and formed a church, an ekklesia.

There were others who were impressed, intellectually convinced, who understood the gospel to some degree, who were drawn to it, who were attracted to it, who associated with the church. This would be consistent with what our Lord said, that the wheat and the tares would grow together, right? You would have believers and non-believers in the same environment that would be very difficult to separate. There are people who are interested, but not genuinely converted. So there were these people associated with the true believers who had not truly left their works system behind. They had not come all the way to faith in Christ.

Well, this little group of Jews that formed this church, this community both genuine believers and those associated and interested non-believers, apparently came under persecution which we know to be the case. Right? Jesus said it, "In this world you'll have tribulation. Don't be surprised if they treat you the way they treated Me. Don't be surprised if they hate you, they hated Me." So we understand that persecution certainly broke out against these community of believers very early, even in the age of the Apostles. In fact, even to the point that the Apostles were martyred.

So in this group of Christians and associates became persecuted, that raised the stakes on being a Christian. The true believers had the faith that endures. The true believers were hanging in there. But the superficial non-believers, those who were merely associated and attracted by not genuine were in danger of leaving. They could be described, I think, pretty easily by the rocky soil or the weedy soil of our Lord's soils parable. There was an appearance of life but it wasn't going to last, especially when the persecution started. They were in danger then of going backward, back in to their Judaism. And so throughout this letter there are repeated calls to them not to do that. And I just read you one. Back in chapter 2 verse 3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" In other words, don't neglect, you've come this far, don't neglect this salvation...which was preached by the Apostles, confirmed by miracles. That's the first warning.

They're warned again in chapter 3 verse 7. "Just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear His voice, don't harden your heart as when they provoked me as in the day of trial in the wilderness where your fathers tried me and tested me, saw my works for 40 years." In other words, don't be like that recalcitrant unbelieving group of Israelites who were stuck in the wilderness for 40 years because of their unbelief. Verse 12, "Take care, brethren, Jewish brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God, you want to be a true partaker of Christ...verse 14...holding fast, firm to the end."

So these are warnings. There are more such warnings in chapter 4, the most familiar warning comes in chapter 6...in chapter 6 verse 4, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened," that's to have your mind illuminated to know the information... "and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." Now let's just stop there.

What is this? Who are these people? Who is he describing? Who has been enlightened? Who has tasted the heavenly gift? Whose been made a partaker of the Holy Spirit? Whose tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come?

Well please notice, none of those terms are ever used anywhere in the Bible to describe salvation. None of them. It doesn't talk about regeneration, new birth, conversion, justification, salvation, sanctification. These are the words used to describe the experience of those who heard the Apostles and saw their miracles and signs and wonders. In that sense they were enlightened. In that sensed they tasted the heavenly gift. They tasted the powers of heaven. They were made partakers of the power of the Holy Spirit, coming through the Apostles and the signs and wonders and gifts of the Spirit. They tasted the good Word of God and they tasted the powers of the age to come. That is all those miracle powers which one day in the age to come, the Millennial Kingdom will be in full display. They were tasters, not consumers...can we put it that way?

The warning comes then in verse 6, “If you have then fallen away, it’s impossible to renew them again to repentance.” In other words, if you have heard the apostolic gospel, if you’ve heard the message of Christ, you have understood it, you are enlightened, you have seen the power display by the Apostles and the power of the Holy Spirit, all of that is in your experience and you turn your back, you can’t be renewed to repentance. Why? Because you can’t have any more exposure, revelation than that. So the warning is, don’t turn your back on it. You’ll become an apostate if you reject full revelation and you’ll be guilty of again crucifying the Son of God and putting Him to open shame.

There’s another warning in chapter 10 and verse 26. “If we go on sinning willfully and the willful sin here is unbelief, if we go on sinning willfully, we Jews, after receiving the knowledge of the truth,” if you know the truth, you know it fully, you’ve seen it, you’ve seen the display, the undergirding display of the Holy Spirit miracle power that attests to the validity of the message preached by the Apostles, if you go on in your sinful unbelief willingly, “then there is no longer any sacrifice for sins.” There’s no other salvation, right? What else can be done? Nothing. You have nothing left, verse 27, but a terrifying expectation of judgment in the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

And listen to this, verse 29, “Your punishment will be worse. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and regarded as unclean the blood of the Covenant by which you were sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” Your punishment will be worse because you had full knowledge and rejected it. And for that person, verse 31 says, “It’s a terrifying thing to fall in to the hands of the living God.” You don’t want to know the full truth and walk away from it.

In chapter 12, the last one I’ll refer you to, in verse 25, “See to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking, for if those who did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven and His voice shook the Earth then but now He has promise saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the Earth but also the heaven.’” If you don’t listen to the Word of the Spirit of God and the Word of the Son of God through the Apostles, all that awaits for you is judgment.

Now, with that we can go back to chapter 11. The truly saved, let’s pull it together, the truly saved were in danger of trying to lessen their persecution by drawing back into old Judaistic patterns, customs, worship, maybe even reconnecting with the priests. They are reminded all through Hebrews that Jesus Christ is a better priest who offered a better sacrifice and who is the mediator of a better Covenant. Don’t go back to the old priesthood, the old ceremonies, the old sacrifices, the old worship. That’s the message to the truly saved. Don’t go back and pick up those pieces of the old religion.

The message to the non-Christians is come all the way to Christ...come all the way to Christ. Chapter

6 says, “Let us go on to perfection,” perfection is a term used to refer to salvation by the writer of Hebrews. Come all the way to Christ. Now, how does one come to Christ? By faith. And so that’s what the emphasis is in chapter 11. This is to help the Christians, the true Christians hold on to the reality of faith by seeing it as the only way ever to come to God from Adam’s family on, and this is to encourage the non-Christians who are a part of that community and feeling the pull back away from Christ, turning their backs on the gospel to come all the way to faith because faith is the only way. The way of law and legalism and works will only condemn and damn.

And since this community apparently is under persecution, this last part of chapter 11 becomes maybe the most applicable to them. We have talked about all kinds of aspects of faith. We have talked about how faith walks. We’ve talked about how faith works. We’ve talked about many of the features of faith. But the last segment we’re looking at now is on the courage of faith. Faith, true faith stands the test of persecution. It stands the test of life and death situations. So the word to have in your mind in this last section, particularly verses 32 and following is the courage of faith...the courage of faith.

Courage in struggle, courage in suffering, courage in waiting...waiting, because remember now, as the close of the chapter says, they hadn’t received what they had put their faith in.

So let’s just break it down. Let’s talk about the courage in struggle that’s illustrated here. Verse 30, the struggle at Jericho, we already talked about from Joshua chapter 6, the struggle of Rahab, Joshua chapter 2, and chapter 6. Both the story of Jericho and in particular the story of Rahab demonstrate that faith conquers in a struggle, that faith is courageous. As the New Testament puts it, it is a faith that endures. That’s how Peter opens up his epistle, right? You have a faith that endures. That’s the test of real faith.

Now when you come to...and we covered that in our last time several months ago. But verse 32, we’ll pick it up. We move here from the patriarchal period of those names in the book of Genesis and Moses and Joshua, and we move now from the arrival to the promised land to the land of Canaan itself and the early history of Israel, which would be the history of the Judges and then the history of the Kings.

There are six men mentioned to us in verse 32. And they are not in chronological order but they were all very critical men in the nation of Israel who demonstrated their faith in God in crisis situations. They were all courageous in faith. So let’s just briefly look at them.

“What more shall I say, for time will fail me,” and I love that feature that’s so human of the writer, and speaks to the reality of a human author certainly under divine inspiration, but nonetheless a human author who would love to tell the whole story of everything but just doesn’t have the time to do it. But

he does mention very familiar names and the people would be able to pick them up quickly. They are essentially the heroes of the early history of Israel. Remember when Israel comes back into the land of Canaan under Joshua, Moses having died before coming in to the land because he struck the rock and didn't speak to the rock. They are now in the land, the land is segmented there. They conquer the Canaanites, as we know. They settle in the land and now that they are in the land, there are heroes who rise from time to time in the pre-monarchy period who lead great triumphs and great victories for the people of God.

The first one is a familiar name to us, his name is Gideon. And if you want to read the story of Gideon, you open your Bible to the seventh chapter of Judges. We can't take the time to do all that for each of these characters. We could, that would be a whole different emphasis. But Gideon is a judge. Now the term judge doesn't mean that they were the ruling president of the nation. It simply means they were elevated to a place where their leadership and their wisdom put them in a ruling position somewhere in the life and the land of Israel. This judge had to face the Medianites. The Medianite army had a hundred and thirty-five thousand men...a hundred and thirty-five thousand men in the Medianite army.

Now you remember the story of Gideon. You open your Bible to the seventh chapter of the book of Judges. He starts out with thirty-two thousand, right? Thirty-two thousand, not impossible odds, but thirty-two thousand against a hundred and thirty-five thousand, not real good odds. And then God comes to him and says, "You have way too many men, you have way too many men, Gideon, you've got to pair this down, and pair this down, and pair this down and finally it gets paired down to three hundred. Three hundred? Those are not good odds against a hundred and thirty-five thousand.

Now, of course, all military strategy is out the window, at this point, because there is no military strategy by which the three hundred men can defeat a hundred and thirty-five thousand soldiers. So Gideon is now at the mercy of God. God has paired down his men to only three hundred so God is going to have to indicate what the strategy is as to how these three hundred men are going to defeat a hundred and thirty-five thousand Medianites.

God gives him strange instruction in the seventh chapter of Judges. He tells him to get pitchers, pitchers used to pour water, trumpets and torches and go find the Medianite army. You go find them. Now in history, no one has fought a battle with torches, pitchers and trumpets. You might announce the battle with a trumpet. You have might have a torch if you want to protect yourself at night, but that's not how you fight a battle. It is in an absurd battle strategy, humanly speaking. And Gideon, perhaps if he were thinking the way any normal human being would think, would say, "Lord, I'm not moving, are You kidding? You've paired me down to three hundred people and the only reason the three hundred are the three hundred is because of the way they drank water out of a stream? This is absurd.

But Gideon didn't argue because his faith was so strong and he understood the odds and he understood the potential for death was a hundred percent on a human level. You remember what happened. They split in to three groups. Gideon took his hundred and a couple of other hundreds, they got in the circles of the hills where the Medianites were and they lit their torches. And at the appropriate time of the announcement, they smashed the pitchers which made noise and revealed the torches and the trumpets began to blow and the Medianites went into panic, probably assuming that for every torch there was an entire division of troops when it was just one guy with a pitcher and a torch and a trumpet.

The Medianites panicked. The Medianites rolled out of their bunks, or off their pads on the ground, and massacred each other. In an absolute slaughter, thinking they were fighting these massive hoards of Jewish troops who had descended upon them. It would be pretty hard to believe God in that setting unless you had a supernatural faith in a supernatural God.

Then there was Barak. I love the story of Barak. It's one of the most interesting of Bible stories. I will take you to this one because it's a little bit shorter. If you go back to Judges chapter 4, it's one of my favorite stories probably for somewhat bizarre reasons. Barak had ten thousand men and he was going against the mighty and massive force of Sisera. Sisera was a Canaanite commander of some confederated chariot troops. Incredible odds, no way to win. But God sent a message to Barak through a woman by the name of Deborah. Barak believed the message. Barak believed that God would give him the victory.

In verse 7, "I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army with his chariots and as many troops to the river Kishon; and I'll give him into your hand." That is the message from God through Deborah who was deemed there a prophetess because God uses her as His mouthpiece.

"Barak said to her, 'If you go with me, then I will go. If you don't go with me, I will not go.'" I want the spokesman of the Lord with me. "She said, 'I will surely go with you, nevertheless the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you're about to take, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.'"

In other words, if you just trusted God and didn't have to take along Deborah, you'd have gotten all the credit. Now you're going to be sort of embarrassed. "The Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman."

Well, of course, the victory came. It was an incredible victory. Skipping down to what I think is one of the most interesting events. "The Lord routed Sisera," verse 15, "and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak," just massacred them. "And Sisera alighted from his chariot

and fled away on foot." That's the general of the army.

Well that didn't work out. "Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword." Not even one was left. That is a massacre.

Sisera is still running in the other direction. Listen to this, "He ran, he fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin and the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite." He was associated with Jabin. "Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, 'Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me. Don't be afraid.' And he turned aside to her into the tent and she covered him with a rug." Come on in here and I'll hide you.

"He said to her, 'Please give me a little water to drink for I am thirsty.' So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink, and then she covered him. He said to her, 'Stand in the doorway to the tent and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there anyone here?' that you shall say, 'No.' But...this is the interesting part...Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple. It went through into the ground, for he was sound asleep and exhausted." I love the last line. "So he died." I guess, if someone ran a tent peg from one side of your head to the other into the ground, that would do it.

This is a small band of almost unarmed infantry, routing a tank division by faith. Stepping courageously into an unbelievable battle, trusting God. These are men of faith.

Well then we come to Samson. Who doesn't know about Samson? Everyone knows about Samson. Judges 13 to 16, he was Israel's champion against the Philistines. And, of course, the Philistines we always identify, I think, as the primary enemy of Israel. They seem to show up on the scene more often than any others. And in spite of his stupidity, in spite of his bad relationship with Delilah, and I don't think in my entire life I've ever met a human being named Delilah. There's a reason for that.

In spite of his tragedy with Delilah, in spite of his loss of strength, this man had years of great strong faith in God. He recovered from that and he demonstrated great courage, stupendous courage and power. That man Samson, that man who had had risen to a place of leadership because of his prowess and his strength was called by God really to conquer the Philistines. And he approached it with immense courage. He never feared to enter into battle. And he knew that at any point in time his strength came from the Lord. There was a symbol of his strength, his long hair, Nazarite vow, but his strength came from the Lord and he knew when he went into battle that at any moment that strength could disappear because he knew his own heart and he knew he was not a man who had by any means deserved this power. He trusted God, let's say, not to pull the plug. He never feared the enemy, never.

First, in anger at the father of his Philistine wife for giving her away to somebody else, he tied the tails of 300 foxes together with torches in between them and set the torches on fire and sent them through the Philistine's grain field and burned them all up. Now he knew that could irritate the Philistines and again he's only one man and he knows that God has given him his power and since it came from God, God could withdraw it at any point, but he has this strong faith in his calling. When the Philistines found out who did it, they killed Samson's wife and father-in-law. He even was more angry and Scripture says, "He smote them with a great slaughter."

When they tried to retaliate, he took the jawbone of an ass and killed a thousand more of them. They tried to trap him in Gaza, he just picked up, you remember this?, the city gates, post and beam and walked up a mountain carrying them. He believed the promise of God, that God had called him to fight for Israel against the Philistines even against unimaginable odds, one against tens of thousands never phased him.

And finally, remember after recovering strength, he went in to the Philistine temple and brought it down on all of them. His last courageous act of self-sacrificing faith. Now he knew his calling. He knew his calling. Listen to 13:5 of Judges, "His parents are told, 'Behold, this young man, you're going to give birth to a son, you're going to conceive and bring forth a son, no razor will come to his head for the boy shall be a Nazarite,'" that takes a vow of separation to God, "'from the womb he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.'" So he always knew when he was doing that, that he would know and experience the power of God.

This is faith...this is faith and nothing but faith and he never flinched in conflict.

Now the next name that we see there is Jephthah and he also is in the book of Judges and the story about him is pretty brief. Verse 32 of chapter 11, "Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon, crossed over the Jordan River, Ammon is on the east. There is a city there today that you would know as Amon-Jordan. Ammon is just a variation of Ammon, this is the land of the Ammonites. So Jephthah who crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them and the Lord gave them into his hand. He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abelkeramim so the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel."

Another group, of course, of Israel's Canaanite enemies were the Amorites, conquered again by the courage of Jephthah. We leave the book of Judges and we enter the book of 1 and 2 Samuel because the next name is David. We know many instances against all kinds of odds. Saul has killed his thousands, but David his ten thousands. David was a triumphant, courageous general who fought the fight for the people of God.

Of course his most familiar fight was a one-on-one battle with what we might deem human monster

by the name of Goliath in chapter 17 of 1 Samuel. And Goliath is just shocked that they would send this little shepherd boy out against him. And he, of course, is the great hero of the Philistines. And so he says, verse 43, “Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?” “And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine also said to David, ‘Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.’ Then David said to the Philistine...probably in a squeaky voice.. ‘You come to me with a sword, a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up in to my hands and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I’ll give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hands.”

Wow! You would say that is a lot of moxie for a little shepherd boy. But we know the end of the story, don’t we? Yes, it happened when the Philistine rose and came near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.” He’s running after it, he’s going into this battle full force in faith. “David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it.” And believe me, that was a divinely directed stone. I’m sure David was good because he had fought off the wild animals while he was protecting the sheep. But there was no way this one would miss. Divine providence was involved.

“It struck the Philistine on his forehead and the stone sank into his forehead so that he fell on his face to the ground. Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone. And he struck the Philistine and killed him, but there was no sword in David’s hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it.

“When the Philistine saw that their champion was dead, they fled.” You know, if a teenaged boy is this powerful, what are the men going to be like when they show up? “The men of Israel,” verse 52, “rose and shouted and pursued the Philistines as far as the valley and the gates of Ekron,” one of the major cities of Philistia. The slain Philistine lay along the way to Shaaraim, even to Gath and Ekron. The sons of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines and plundered their camps and David took the Philistine’s head and brought it to Jerusalem but he put his weapon in his tent.”

What in the world would give this man the courage to do what he did? It is faith in the calling of God. These are men of faith.

The next name is Samuel and for that, of course, we’re already in 1 Samuel because we’re where David is. Samuel also appears here in the first 25 chapters. He dies in verse 1 of chapter 25. Samuel was a great man of faith. He was...he was facing a rebellious people. He was facing idolatrous people. He faced them with the courage of great conviction. He spoke God’s Word. He thought

nothing of personal protection and personal safety. Samuel always said what he believed to be right against all threats. He was fearless when he warned people and he warned people, believe me, including even the great High Priest Eli.

And then it mentions in verse 32 the prophets. And with that, we sweep all the way from 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, the books of history, the period of the kings, the period of the unified Kingdom, the divided Kingdom. We sweep all the way through the prophets, all the way down to the end of the Old Testament...the prophets.

Now you can go back to Hebrews chapter 11 because we're going to remain there for just a few more minutes. And here he just mentions the prophets. That takes us right to the end of the Old Testament. The wisdom literature was authored by the kings predominantly; Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon. There are other historical books, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, goes back to patriarchal period. But we pretty well have swept across the Old Testament, and now we come to the prophets. And here you have no more names, but you have experiences that belonged to the prophets. These defining experiences we can find on the pages of the Old Testament. It's a list of horrible experiences which these men faced and women with unconquerable courage and faith.

The prophets, verse 33, along with all the rest who by faith, or through faith in every case conquered kingdoms, literally katagonizomai, overcame, overpowered, overthrew. It literally means to fight down or to subdue. And this would describe the Judges. This would describe Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah and David. And they not only conquered kingdoms, they wrought or they performed righteousness. Literally they executed justice. They executed judgment, leaders who upheld justice in very, very challenging times. They were men who did what was right no matter what the cost. It says of David, for example, in 2 Samuel 8:15, "David reigned over all Israel and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people."

Then it says they obtained promises. There are many illustrations of that. Joshua was given a promise of victory. Gideon was given a promise of victory. Barak was given a promise of victory, David was given promises by God that were fulfilled and some that were to be fulfilled later.

And then we move past those when we come to the next phrase, "shut the mouths of lions." Who does that describe? Daniel...Daniel chapter 6 verses 22 and 23. Daniel who obeyed God when it meant he had to go to the lion's den, believing God would take care of that and God shut the mouths of the lions.

Quench the violence of fire. Who would that refer to? Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as we know them, by their Babylonian names who standing in the fire were not burned. And, in fact, there was a companion in the fire, very likely an appearance of the Son of God. They

conquered. They went into the fire. And do you remember what they said? They said, “We’re not going to bow down to you and if we go in the fire, we’ll burn, or maybe we won’t burn, but in any case we will not bow down to you.” They conquered by faith.

It can be said of these heroes also, they escaped the edge of the sword. Who was it that was always trying to kill David? Saul, wasn’t it? No matter how often Saul tried to get David’s head within the reach of his sword, he never could.

And then, of course, there was Goliath. And then there was Elisha. Do you remember when Jorum was rushing after Elisha in 2 Kings 6, wanting to kill him with his sword but he could not? And then it says they were from weakness, verse 34, made strong. You know who comes to mind when I read that? Hezekiah. Remember Hezekiah prayed for long life. He prayed for more life? Because he was a good king, God gave him more life. He had no son in the death struggle. He believed in God’s promise and power and Hezekiah prayed and was healed and lived another 15 years and eventually bore a son, 2 Kings chapter20.

It further says about these heroes who lived by faith that they became mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight. And we just read about them. Back to the Judges and the Kings and even more of the Kings, particularly in the southern Kingdom.

And then I love this, “It is through the faith of these men,” verse 35, “that women received back their dead by resurrection.” When did that happen? First Kings 17, that’s Elijah...Elijah, healing the dead son of the widow of Zarephath. And then in 2 Kings 4 it’s Elisha raising the child of the Shunammite woman from the dead. The faith of these prophets in death brought great victory.

So this is a faith that conquers very, very challenging, life-threatening circumstances. The petty problems of suffering that these Hebrews to whom the letter was written might have been going through for their identification with Jesus Christ was nothing like what these men experienced.

But that’s not the whole picture. Sometimes God chooses not to let His people conquer in struggle, but rather refines them through a struggle. Verse 35 again, “Others were tortured, not accepting their release.” That’s not a victory...that’s not a release from torture but an endurance so that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Now here we saw the achievements of faith in the midst of the threat. Here we see the endurance of faith in the midst of the trial. Verse 35 says, “Tortured,” tumpanizo, very interesting Greek word. Literally to torture with the tumpanium. What is a tumpanium? It’s a torture instrument of ancient times. It’s a wheel-shaped contraption over which criminals were stretched as though they were skins and they would have all their extremities stretched to the circumference of the wheel and they would

rotate on the wheel while people pummeled them with clubs. This is the basis of the word “tortured.”

There have been those people of faith who have been tortured. They rejected denial of the faith. They rejected release. They would not banish from their lips the name of the true and living God because they looked for a better resurrection. They looked to the future.

Others experienced mockings and scourgings and chains and imprisonments. I think of one who went through just about all of this and that would be Jeremiah...tortured, chained, imprisoned, thrown into a pit, Jeremiah 38, scourgings, beatings, imprisonments...that would be true of Daniel, too, wouldn’t it? And there are surely others.

Verse 37, they were stoned. That happened to Jeremiah according to tradition. And the Old Testament record of Zechariah as well indicates a stoning. Sawn asunder, tradition says, Isaiah the prophet’s life ended when he was sawn in half. They were tested, that’s probably a better translation than tempted. They were tested, the torture of being tested, pressured to deny their God which they would not do.

These aren’t the triumphant ones on a human level, these are the ones who suffered even death. They were put to death with the sword, died by sword. And some of them became exiles. Some of them went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill treated, mistreated, treated with evil force is the Greek verb.

And then down in verse 38, some of them wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And I think all of these things would be somewhat familiar to the Jewish people who were hearing this, being read in their congregations. They knew the stories of these people that we don’t know because they’re not necessarily contained in the pages of Scripture, but likely much of it was passed down. And so in a cryptic fashion, it can be rehearsed to them. They were wanderers, vagabonds, just existing because they had been put out society. That was the price they paid for their faithfulness to God.

And then the most commendatory statement that is made in this entire chapter is in parenthesis in verse 38 and it really ought to be in italics. “These are people of whom the world was not worthy.” Isn’t that a great statement? The world was not worthy. The world thought them unworthy. The world deemed them unworthy to live, unworthy to be comfortable, unworthy to be affirmed or approved, or left alone. The world felt itself somehow diminished by their presence. The truth is, the world was not worthy of them.

Why did they do this? Why did they do this against all this kind of terrible treatment? They did it because of what they believed was in the future waiting for them, a better resurrection. But look at

verse 39, “All these having gained approval through their faith didn’t receive what was promised.” They didn’t have anything in their hand, it was all faith, right? It was all faith. They didn’t even know about Christ. Oh they knew the prophecies about Him, but they didn’t know who He was. He had not come. He had not died. He had not risen from the dead. There was no confirmation that this would ever happen. They had to believe God’s promise. And they did. They gained approval through their faith, though they didn’t receive what was promised because God had provided something better for us that apart from us they wouldn’t be made perfect. None of them would ever be in heaven if it weren’t for what happened that we know about, right? The cross and the resurrection. The better thing is the New Covenant.

Perfect means saved in the book of Hebrews. Perfect means access, open and granted to

God, full access to what the Old Covenant couldn’t give, access into the presence of God both in time and eternity. They lived by faith in something they couldn’t see. They lived...and that’s how the chapter’s beginning launches it, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. That’s how these great heroes lived. Their faith was courageous faith. They conquered in struggle. They continued in suffering. And they counted on a salvation that would be provided in a way they could not see.

Now I’m going to read verse 1 of chapter 12. “Therefore,” this is not the end of the story and shouldn’t be the beginning of a new chapter. “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...” We know who they are, right? We just met them all and to what do they witness? To what do they witness? They witness to the validity of a life of...what?...faith. “Let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and let us run with endurance the faith race set before us.”

These are given to us as models and examples to stimulate our commitment to run an enduring race of faith. Now, as I said, the chapter shouldn’t end at the end of the chapter, it should go in to chapter 12, so it will next week. We’ll look at the twelfth chapter.

Father, thank You again for a wonderful day of worship and fellowship and we have been so greatly enriched tonight to be swept through the ages. The wrapping our minds around these great pinnacle people, these heroes of the faith, these great men and women who endured so much for what they couldn’t see. Blessed are the ones who have not seen and yet believe. May we run this faith race as they did for while we have seen through the eyes of biblical revelation the full record of Christ and His death and resurrection, we have yet not seen the future. We have not seen what God has prepared for them who love Him. May we endure in faith. May our faith be a real and genuine saving faith, an unwavering, enduring faith, tested and proven true. And may we enjoy the trials and tests that come against our faith because, as Peter said, they produce endurance and endurance has a perfecting

work. We cherish the trials that demonstrate our faith holds because that gives us assurance that it’s the real thing and there’s no greater joy for us than to know that our faith is real and our salvation is genuine. We thank You for the consistency of Scripture and how it sweeps over vast eras of history without wavering from its integrity and the message that a relationship to God is always based on faith and faith will triumph where works must fail. Strengthen our faith, we pray, through these examples in Christ’s name. Amen.

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