

Heb. 11 32-40 A Summary of Faith

Today, we come to the end of cp. 11. If anyone is counting, this is sermon 16. What a blessing it has been for me (hopefully for you) to delve more deeply into the lives of so many OT saints, this great “cloud of witnesses” (12:1), all of whom are commended for their faith. And this same principle stands today. God is pleased with the faith of his people. Faith is the most precious gift. For through it, we receive the promises of God; we receive God Himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ. By faith we are saved (Eph. 2:8). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we know and understand all we can that the Bible teaches us about faith. Today, I have 4 parts to the sermon on vv. 32-40 which will serve as a summary of the entire chapter. 1) Recipients of Faith, 2) Achievements of Faith, 3) The Sustaining Power of Faith, and 4) The Goal of Faith.

1. The Recipients of Faith. It is interesting that the author, after highlighting so many men and women of faith in cp. 11, that he realizes he must move on with the rest of the letter. And so he says in v. 32: “*And what more shall I say? For time would fail me.*” I’m following his example by not preaching a sermon on the rest and bringing the chapter to a close. In v. 32 the author mentions 6 specific people and the prophets as a group as examples of faith. He mentions individuals and groups of people which include judges (Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and Samuel) a priest (Samuel), a king (David), and the prophets, all as examples of those with faith. In v. 35 he mentions “women” as those who saw their children raised from the dead. This refers to the widow of 1 Kings 17 and her son, for who Elijah prayed and God raised him from the dead. Also, 2 Kings 4 as we see the same with Elisha and the Shunamite woman. In this text we also see scores of other individuals not mentioned, but were examples of faith. So what can we learn from their examples: 4 truths.

i. They represent every kind of person. Gideon was a farmer. Barak was a soldier. Samson was a religious Nazarite. David was the youngest of his family, a shepherd, and then a king. Samuel was used by God from his youth. Jephthah was an illegitimate child. There are widows who are not named. And the circumstances pictured in this text represent every kind of person in this world. There are rich, poor, men and women, surely various skin colors, young and old, strong and weak physically, etc. The application of this truth is that God is no respecter of persons.

ii. They live in the best of times and the worst of times. It is so interesting that 4 of our examples live (Samuel the 5th as transitional from the time of the judges to the time of the kings) in what may be considered the lowest of low in the history of Israel for morality. The stories we read in the Book of Judges are way beyond anything we’ve known in our lifetimes as concerns ethics in society. And throughout history if we consider all the cultures, civilizations, governments, even in a fallen world, there are periods and times of great morality and striking immorality. Yet, through them all, God has a remnant, a people of faith. Also, there are times of peace and prosperity, and even a strong sense of morality. We see this some with David and particularly with Solomon. I think one may argue that for much of America’s early history, we experienced this as a nation. But, all these examples abound in the world and are changing with the providence of God in every place. But, people of faith are always found. This means, by the grace of God, we can live, and will live in the best of times and the worst of times.

iii. They are far from perfect. Gideon didn't merely obey, but asked God for signs. Barak, the great commander of the army was fearful and needed the help of Deborah the prophetess to spur him on. Samson! Wow! The partying, proud, questioner of his parents' wisdom, lover of foreign women who loved to tell riddles. Jephthah, the illegitimate child who hung out with the wrong people. Even David, the one who deceived, committed adultery, and murdered the woman's husband. And what about Rahab! . . . The Hall of Faith is filled with sinners. Yet, they are commended for their faith. (Ask? Are we any different?)

iv. Their faith is evident in their endurance. Through all life's persecutions, hardships, victories, whatever comes, faith endures to the end. They did not fall away. When they were victorious and had great prosperity, they did not forsake their God. When they suffered, they did not forsake God. They endured! These 4 truths are universal when it comes to faith. We are no different!

2. The Achievements of Faith. The first half of our text is filled with glorious achievements of God's people of faith. Let's just walk through these for just a moment. They "conquered kingdoms." Here, the reference is the conquest of Canaan, beginning with the great walled city of Jericho. This continues with King David. They enforced justice. The literal translation is "**wrought righteousness.**" He speaks of Israel's judges. But, the wider scope of this meaning is godly living. God's people of faith have always stood out as people of righteousness. They "obtained promises." God gave the Midianites to Gideon. God gave the land of Canaan to Joshua and Israel. God gave the kingdom to David as he promised. And God has given his Son.

They "**stopped the mouths of lions.**" Our example is Daniel as he slept peacefully with the lions. They "**quenched the power of fire.**" Such was the case with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They "**escaped the edge of the sword.**" How many times did Saul throw his javelin at David? And what about Elijah, who ran from Jezebel, but was not captured? The text continues: "**were made strong out of weakness.**" I think of Samson in the last day of his life. Not able to see, having lost his strength, being made a spectacle for the entertainment of the Philistines . . . Yet, by faith, he asked for strength and brought down the theatre. They "**became mighty in war,**" and "**put foreign armies to flight.**" How many times in the OT do we see Israel miraculously defeat their enemies? The final achievement is the greatest of all. "**Women received back their dead by resurrection.**" Here we see the great enemy of death thwarted, which is a picture of the resurrection of Christ and our final resurrection one day.

After reading these achievements, I have a big question: Did the Hebrews to which this letter was written experience such achievements? Well, THEY DID NOT experience such achievements, at least not of the same sort. Yet, they had the exact SAME faith. What was their experience? Well, as Jews who had come to Christ, they were suffering persecution. Look back at 10:2-34: "**But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property . . .**" Though their ancestors experienced such achievements, they did not. This is why the next verses speak of faith during times of persecution and suffering (which we will move to in a moment). I think the author is saying, "*you may think you also will achieve such things, but what if, in God's providence, you do not?*" Maybe they were thinking, "*This is not our experience. Do we even*

have faith?” He is saying, (as we will see in the next verses) that their faith will be displayed in different ways, particularly through suffering. A few applications before moving on.

Application: There is nothing of any kind that cannot be overcome when a person has faith! Faith will conquer them all. There is nothing too hard for God! And God will accomplish his purposes through his people of faith. This is the way God has designed faith. And, God will receive all the glory!

Application: Faith is the same, through both great achievements and when these achievements are lacking. What does this say about the “health, wealth, prosperity movement?” What does this say about so many folks that believe we lack faith when we pray for God to heal and He does not? Well, I think the NT should give us a good perspective. It is clear that the letters to the churches and the Christians in the first century were written, NOT to those who experience what we see in vv. 33-35, but instead what we see in vv. 36-38. Yes, the apostles wrought great miracles. But, their experience was what? Suffering! All of them (martyrdom and banishment). The overwhelming message of Christ and the NT is this: **“those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (2 Tim. 3:12). Maybe we aren’t persecuted because we aren’t very godly, or maybe our desire for godliness is not very high.

Application: There will be great achievements! I think of Rom. 8:18 ff. **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God . . . And, we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved . . . And we know that for those who love God all things work together for their good . . .”** Yes, NOW, we have come to the heavenly city . . . in Christ. Yes, we are seated with Him in the heavenly places. Yes, Christ is ruling now. But, there are things to come. Let’s move on.

3. The Sustaining Power of Faith. In vv. 36-38 we read: **“Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”** Here, we see the other side of the “great” achievements. We see people of faith enduring sufferings and persecutions. This was the experience of the Hebrews of this letter. And this is the experience of Christians in this world. The Apostle Paul was mocked and beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, thrown in prison. Why did he not give up and say, *“I was mistaken about Christ?”* As history tell us, *“Why did Peter, when they were going to hang him on a cross, instead of begging for his life, ask to be hung upside down, saying he was not deserving to be hung as the Lord Jesus?”* What about Martin Luther? When asked to recant his views he says to the King: *“Since your most serene majesty and your highnesses require of me a simple, clear, and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the council, because it is clear that they have fallen into error . . . If, then I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons, if I am not satisfied by the very text I have cited, and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God’s word, I neither can nor will retract anything . . . Here I stand I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”*

Why, young high school student, do you not go along with your peers when they ask you to look at something on your phone that goes against godliness? Why college athlete, do you not stand with the majority of the team when they beg you to come along with their ungodliness and worldliness. Why do you go to the abortion clinic and say, *“This is not right”* as everyone curses you and makes fun of you? On and on we can go! Why? FAITH . . . FAITH in the gospel of Jesus Christ! You believe in the incarnation, that God took on flesh. You believe that He lived a sinless life. You believe He laid down his life on the cross as a sacrifice for your sins. You believe he rose again and now sits at the right of the father. You believe He is coming again in glory. You believe in a better city, a heavenly one. Why? FAITH! This is the difference!

Let me remind us that faith is a gift from God. And it is “life.” It is “powerful.” It sustains us and we endure! Do you remember the “new birth” of Nicodemus from Jimmy last week? Faith flows from the new birth. I think of the baby birds that are currently in my fern bush. Since they were born, their mouths are wide open, READY for the worm or the bug from their mother. In the same way, those who have been born again are given the gift of faith. (This is my experience. And those of you listening today with faith know what I’m talking about.) Faith produces fruit, whether they be great fruits of accomplishment, or the fruit of what happens on the “inside” as we face persecutions or troubles or the effects of sin in this world upon our lives. We must not be surprised! 1 Pet. 4:12-13 says: **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”** I have some applications.

Application: There is nothing more valuable than FAITH. Look at v. 38: **“of whom the world is not worthy.”** Faith turns what the world thinks is normal and right . . . upside down . . . and is contrary to the ways of the world. Just this past week a Christian group trying to meet in a convention center in Quebec, Canada was turned down because of their stance on abortion as going “against government values.” This is only one example. But our text gives so many kinds of examples of this very thing going on in the world. In their minds, these Christians are not “worthy.” They are not “valuable.” The world says, *“Get on board. And if so, you are worthy.”* They are saying, *“you are like us. We approve.”* Rom. 1:32 says: **“Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”** The world loves its own! It cherishes its own! It elevates its own . . . But, God commends and counts those with faith as “worthy.” God loves his own! (find verses) I would argue that ONE SUFFERER with faith is more worthy than the entire world. And, who is our example? It is Christ. Is. 53:3 says He was: **“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”**

Application: Faith displays the great worth of the glory of God. God orchestrates these persecutions. He allows the weakness. Why? So He will get all the glory. And, he knows that we can only come to him as a good Father in these times. So, I urge you, no matter what is going on to come to Him by faith as a good father.

Application: Both great achievements and the sustaining power of faith in suffering and persecutions are the same. There is no difference. Therefore, we must accept either of these ways when they come.

Application: Christ KNOWS your sufferings. He understands completely. Heb. 4:15 says: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

4. The Goal of Faith. (Very briefly). The answer is obvious. It is God and his promises! Faith does not look to the things of this world, but to God and his promises. With the examples of cp. 11, they received some promises, but they had not received the GREAT PROMISE of Christ. They were saved by faith as they looked forward to the promise of Christ, in whom ALL God’s promises are found. It is absolutely amazing that they continued to believe though the promise had not yet come. However, God still commended their faith. Look at vv. 39-40: “**And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.**” The last part of this verse brings us into the equation. It says they were made perfect with us. There is a lot here as the Book of Hebrews speaks of being made “perfect.” But, simply put, their faith, and our faith is in the same promise. For salvation is only found in the name of Christ (Acts 4:12). They looked forward. We look back! In both cases the goal of faith is Christ, his person and his work.

As we bring chapter 11 to an end, I hope we can all say, “I know what faith is. I know what faith looks like.” When I step back in try to take in ALL of what faith is in chapter eleven, I think it can be summarized easily by thinking about it from two perspectives that sum it up. The first perspective is this: We know what faith looks like. It is full of action, both in the good times and the bad. James summarizes faith well by saying, “***if faith does not have good works, faith is dead***” (2:17). This is what we’ve seen with these examples in the great hall of faith. Faith does what is right. Faith perseveres. Faith continues even when it does not understand. Faith expects God to give help. Faith believes the promises of God and lives accordingly. Faith is evidenced by godliness in this life. WE KNOW WHAT FAITH LOOKS LIKE. All we have to do is read the commands of Christ throughout the Bible. Yet, from another, deeper perspective, faith comes from the heart. Faith is the powerful gift of God that lives in the heart. So, faith . . . loves . . . God! Faith delights in Him, which is also to say faith delights in the Son. “Believe in God. Believe also in me” (John 14:1). And this brings us back to the promise of God in the Gospel. ALL God’s promises are fulfilled in the Son. This is what the Book of Hebrews is about! And YES, there are more promises to come! We do await the new heavens and the new earth. And YES, there are promises that we live by . . . NOW. Christ will never leave us nor forsake us. And as we conclude this morning, I will leave us with the next two verses: “**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God**” (Heb. 12:1-2).