

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part forty-nine

Sunday, April 15th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2043

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SAME FAITH - DIFFERENT BLESSINGS - LEARNING THE WISDOM OF GOD THROUGH ALL OF LIFE

Hebrews 11:32-40 - "And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. [36] Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] 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— [38] of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. [39] And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised. [40] since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

This text matters because it trains readers to **not** make an absolute system of the effects of faith in those who exercise it. And, unless you've lived under a rock for the last fifty years, that's exactly what much of the church has tended to do in publications and word-faith churches. Untold fortunes have been amassed by people who sell the idea that if faith is exercised in just the right way a divine law of predictable positive results must follow.

The result of this is faith is **measured** not by its **endurance** but by its **immediate results**. Enough faith guarantees certain results. Weak faith or lacking faith will be revealed in continued sickness, poverty, or a host of other evils.

Understand. We **should** exercise faith. There are **precious promises** in God's Word. And they're there to encourage prayer and trust and hope. God **is** a good and responsive God. He loves to reveal Himself faithful in blessing His people. You'll get no argument from me. We should ask and seek and knock in the face of God's promise.

The problem is the creation of an **airtight system**. The problem is the mistaken system that contradicts much the data of divine revelation. And that's the importance of today's text.

1) **FAITH CALCULATES ON THE PROMISE OF GOD RATHER THAN THE ODDS OF SUCCESS THAT APPEAR STACKED AGAINST IT**

Hebrews 11:32-35 - "And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life."

Just before we jump into analyzing these verses we should pause to remember what our writer **assumes** in writing them. He's trying to encourage the same faith in his readers as they face persecution for their departure from Judaism in becoming disciples of Christ. He wants his account of the faith of these names to **feed faith** in his readers. But look at the way he lists these names - "**And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets....**" (32).

No details are given. It's just a list of names. And there is no food for faith in that list at all **unless his readers have learned the details of the stories behind these names**. Our writer's persecuted readers are being queued up to fill in the faith-building details in these biblical accounts.

What you're witnessing is the reason so many Christians find the life of faith a struggle all their days. They don't know the **stories of faith**. They never go to Christian Education. They aren't in church Sunday night. They never attend a small core group on Wednesday. They struggle to find fifteen minutes in their Bible each day. They're better informed about the Leafs and the Raptors and the TSX than the history of the Old Testament.

And then the whining will start - "**It's just so hard to be a Christian in today's world. So many oppose and misunderstand my commitment to Christ. What's the use in following Jesus?**" And all the while they've ignored what our writer assumes in

today's text. ***Faith comes from hearing. And hearing comes from the word of God.***

Notice that word, ***"hearing."*** That means ***nothing else will sound right*** - that's what ***"hearing"*** means - ***nothing else will make sense or register the way God would like in my heart unless I am crammed full - brain packed to the brim - with the accounts of God's Word.***

Now back to our first point - ***Faith calculates on the promise of God rather than the visible odds of success.*** You'd have to know these stories to pull faith-food out of this text. ***Gideon*** is stunned at the power of God as this cowardly leader heads up a crushing defeat of the Midianite invaders. What's more, he does it after God reduces his army from ***30,000*** to ***300*** men. ***Barak*** leads Israel against the massive Canaanite army with its seemingly insurmountable ***900 chariots of iron*** threatening Israel's annihilation. ***Samson***, one single man, was mightily ***"anointed by the Spirit of God"*** - so the text says - to devastate the military might of the Philistines.

And what about ***David*** who, as little more than a boy too small for Saul's amour, walked boldly out against Goliath with these words - ***"...You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with 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 defied"*** (1 Samuel 17:45). Not one person would have put odds on David at that moment. Not long after he took off Goliath's head.

What is our writer's point in this ancient history? He has an audience reading his letter. They are discouraged - right on the edge of questioning their decision to become disciples of Christ. They're not just a little down like we all get a little down now and then. They're threatened. They're kicked from their own homes. They're ostracized by all the friends they used to have. They've been disowned by their own families. Many have been falsely accused on trumped up charges and put in prison:

Hebrews 10:32-34 - "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, ***you endured a hard struggle with sufferings***, [33] sometimes being ***publicly exposed to reproach and affliction***, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. [34] For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted ***the plundering of your property***, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one."

Now we bring these verses home. ***What are the things marching on your life? What are the things vastly bigger than your resources? What has you doubting your own ability to cope or continue much longer?***

That's what this list of individuals in today's text is all about. All of the terrible things happening to them weren't caused by ***lack*** of faith. They were caused ***by*** their faith. All their troubles were designed to ***test*** their faith and ***purify*** their faith and exercise and strengthen their faith.

Do you know their stories? Do you read them over and over until you have them almost memorized? They're there to remind you faith never calculates on the consistent removal of external trial and suffering. Many times faith is demonstrated right in the middle of these things rather than by the removal of them.

But there's something else even more precious here:

2) **PAST FAILURE DOESN'T DISQUALIFY ME FROM REACHING OUT IN EXPECTANT FAITH FOR PRESENT NEED**

Same verses - ***Hebrews 11:32-35*** - "And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of ***Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David*** and Samuel and the prophets— [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35] Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life."

We need to remember these were highly blemished men. ***Gideon***, after defeating the Midianites fashioned a golden ephod and set up worship in his own city of ***Ophrah***, contrary to the law of God. The text gives a blunt account of his wicked act - ***Judges 8:27*** - "And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And ***all Israel whored after it there***, and it became ***a snare to Gideon and to his family.***"

Jephthah is most famous, not for his defeat of the Ammonites, but for his wicked and rash vow to the Lord as he bargained for victory - **Judges 11:30-34** - "And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, [31] then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." [32] So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the LORD gave them into his hand. [33] And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel. [34] Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter."

Samson disobeyed the clear command of the Lord by marrying a woman from the Philistines. He frequented the company of prostitutes. **David** committed adultery with Bathsheba while her husband was on the battle field defending David's kingdom. Then David arranged to have her husband killed.

More could be said, but the point stands. The saint's walk of faith is highly tainted. Our reach of faith is always a sinner's reach. Our confession of faith will always feel hypocritical in some measure when we're inwardly honest. That's where faith must be exercised. That's what makes faith in Jesus necessary in the first place.

That's what makes this list of faith exemplars such a breath of fresh air. There's no pretending here. We get the whole story in the Biblical text. And from it we learn the weak and failing can repent their way back to the pathway of faith. They don't have to hide and are not set on the sidelines of the walk of faith. They can trust in a mighty God and a gracious, pardoning Christ. We learn Christ's work on our behalf is linked directly to **His mercy**, not **our merit**. And this is not only true of His work **in** us, but also His work **through** us by faith.

3) THERE IS A VICTORY IN FAITH EVEN WHEN THERE IS NO DELIVERANCE FROM THE COST OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:35-40 - "Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. [36] Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] 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— [38] of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. [39] And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, [40] since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

I have three thoughts I want to draw out of these verses:

- a) *As our writer tries to encourage these persecuted Hebrew disciples he chooses not to hide from them the kind of suffering many of the faithful have suffered in the past.*

Why not just tell of David and Goliath - of Daniel in the lion's den - of the walls of Jericho falling? Because while there may come times when they will relate to those accounts of mighty deliverance there will also come many times when their faith in Christ will bring more difficulties than it removes. And our writer wants them ready for that.

No careful reader can miss this constant theme in the New Testament:

John 15:18-21 - "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

1 Peter 4:12 - "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."

- b) *There is a better life ahead than escaping physical death and faithful disciples think about that better resurrection.*

Hebrews 11:35 - "Women *received back their dead by resurrection*. Some *were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life*."

This verse is a study in contrasts. Some women, as a result of their trusting in the Lord, received their loved ones (children?) back from the grave. And what a celebration of joy there must have been. Can you imagine what that would feel like?

But there are other women in the same verse. These women were offered a chance to find relief from their torture and pain. All they had to do was renounce their faith. And, says our writer, their torture continued right into the loss of life. They wouldn't accept the terms of comfort.

And then our writer does something very forceful and powerful. He deliberately **compares** the kind of resurrection the **first** group of women received with their deceased loved ones with the kind of resurrection these **faithful unto death, tortured women receive when Jesus comes again**. And he says they get an even **better life to come** because they will never die again, unlike that temporary reunion the first group of women received with their raised loved ones.

And our writer's point is faithful disciples **think and plan and aim at that better life to come right in the middle of trials that don't go away**. Beautiful.

c) ***None of these exemplars of faith received God's ultimate promised blessing, and that is for our good.***

Certainly some of them received **some** of what God had promised. Moses received deliverance from Egypt. Joshua saw the walls of Jericho fall. Rahab was spared. So yes, God was faithful in giving specific promises to these people of faith.

But our text is still emphatic. In a much deeper sense **none** of these people received the promised future blessing of God:

Hebrews 11:13 - "These *all* died in faith, *not having received the things promised*, but having *seen them and greeted them from afar*, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."

Hebrews 11:39 - "And *all these*, though commended through their faith, *did not receive what was promised*...."

Hebrews 11:14-16 - "For people who speak thus make it clear that they are *seeking a homeland*. [15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire *a better country, that is, a heavenly one*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has *prepared for them a city*."

How can it be true that people like Abraham and Moses and Joshua **didn't** receive God's promise? What about the specific answers to their situations from God? And the answer to that question the same for them as for you and me. God has something better than anything this world can offer. There is the promise of the **perfect new creation in Jesus Christ**.

And God had all those Old Covenant saints wait for the fulfillment of that promise for the same reason He has you and me still wait for that promise. He wants to have more and more and more come to repentance and faith. He doesn't want to have **Moses** made new creation perfect apart from **you** being made new creation perfect. And He doesn't want **you** being made new creation perfect apart from **your neighbor** being new creation perfect.

This ending to this chapter shouldn't surprise us. Our writer clued us in on the great still-to-be-completed plan of Father God way back in the introduction to this letter - **Hebrews 1:2 - "... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the *heir of all things*, through whom also he created the world."**

Notice that last phrase. Since the creation of this world God was planning His **new creation**. There was always a divine promise that reached forward into a brand new era. And it was always God promise and plan to have this new creation brought about through Jesus Christ.

The point being that just as Christ was the agent of this **present creation** - "**... through whom also he created the world**"- the **new creation** is just as certain and real as this present visible order. We rest in a proven unstoppable hope!