

Hebrews 11-32-40

Preamble: Bible reading plan and benevolence gifts

Introduction:

William Carey was an uneducated, dirt-poor, shoemaker, with a stutter. He lived in 18th century England with his mentally unstable wife. His future did not look very bright.

When he expressed his passion to take the gospel to India at a church convention an older pastor said, “Young man, sit down! When God wants to convert the heathen, he will do it without you or me!” Other pastors reminded him that he was an untrained shoemaker with a crazy wife. He was undeterred.

In 1793, he finally managed to scrap together enough resources to go to India, but his unstable wife sat on the dock and refused to leave. Twice he got down on his knees and begged her to join him.

When they finally arrived in India, the Hindus tried to kill them.
A little later, the British East India company refused to let them travel inland.
Then, His five-year-old son died.
Then, his wife totally lost her mind.

William labored seven years before he saw a single convert.
Then his wife died. He remarried. Then his second wife died.

After 20 years he had a small handful of converts and two dead wives.

At this point, most people would have quit. I’m sure he thought about quitting many times. Every time he overcame one obstacle, he faced two more. The trials were like waves at the beach, they just kept coming.

But he persevered faith....

By age 73 he had translated the Bible into 34 languages, founded India’s first college, established 45 teaching centers, alleviated famine by teaching new agricultural methods, and worked to free oppressed Indian women.

Today he is known as the father of modern missions and there are over 25 million Christians in India, five times as many as in England.

How did he persevere? Faith! He really believed that life was short. He really believed that the resurrection was coming. He really believed that the gospel had the power to transform lives.

His faith was the engine that drove his perseverance.

How about you? Do you ever feel like quitting? Do you ever wonder if Christianity is too hard? What is going to help us keep running the race?

This brings us to the end of Hebrews 11.

The author of Hebrews once again fixes our eyes on the great heroes of the faith. Men and Women like William Carey. As we read about these people, we are meant to ask one question; what enabled them to persevere? The answer is faith. Faith empowered their perseverance.

And faith will empower our perseverance!!!

How specifically did faith empower their perseverance?

Faith empowered them to conquer trials

Faith empowered them to suffer well

Faith empowered them to wait patiently

First, faith empowered them to conquer trials.

Hebrews 11:32–35a (ESV) — 32 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..

The author of Hebrews is getting short on time, so he abbreviates his discussion by quickly listing several heroes of faith from the OT. Why? He wants to inspire his audience to conquer their trials by faith, just as the OT saints did.

We can't look up every OT reference but let's look at a few... Gideon is mentioned in 11:32...

By faith Gideon conquered his trials! (this is a reference to Judges 6-8)

It is roughly 1200 BC. The mighty Midianites are oppressing Israel. They are killing Israelite farmers and stealing all their crops. The people of God are forced to hid in mountain caves.

God appears to Gideon and says, "Gideon, I have chosen you to save Israel..." Gideon is not very excited about this announcement. So, he tries to evade God's call on his life. He basically says, "God, I'm not so sure I'm your man..." Then Gideon makes God prove himself not once, but twice. He "fleeces God." He makes God perform two miracles. Don't fleece God. This was an act of unbelief. God told Gideon that he was going to rescue Israel through Gideon, and Gideon did not believe him.

Later on, Gideon and 32,000 troops prepare to meet the Midianites in battle.

God says to Gideon, "Gideon you have too many troops. If you win, you will think you won by your strength, and not my power. Tell anyone who is afraid to fight to go home." 22,000 men leave.

God appears again and says, "Gideon you now have 10,000 men, that is still have too many troops. Have all the men drink some water from the brook. Everyone who laps the water like a dog can leave. Everyone else can stay and fight."

This leaves Gideon with 300 men. According to the book of Judges, the Midianite army is massive. They are spread out in the Valley like a massive swarm of locusts and their camels were "without number like sand on the seashore."

By faith Gideon and his small band of 300 soldiers armed with trumpets and torches attacked and conquered the Midianites.

This was a stupendous act of faith...

By faith Gideon conquered his trials!

By faith Samson conquered his trials! (this is a reference to Judges 13-16)

Samson, like Gideon, was called by God to lead Israel in the period of the Judges. Unfortunately, Samson was much more interested in the ladies of Philistia. He visited prostitutes, chased woman, and encouraged violence.

Eventually, he allows himself to be seduced by the Godless Delilah, an enemy of Israel. To make a long story short, she cuts his hair, causing him to lose his supernatural strength, and is he overcome by his enemies. They torture him and gouge out his eyes. Then he is forced into slavery. He is now the laughingstock of the Philistines.

But... many years later Samson regains his faith and his supernatural strength. He is placed in the temple of Dagon, the God of the Philistines, to be ridiculed. This means that he is surrounded by thousands of key Philistine leaders. He is placed in the middle of the temple next to the two main supporting columns. With one last act of faith, he shoves the columns with all his might and the temple of Dagon comes crashing down, killing thousands of Israel's oppressors.

By faith, samson conquered his trials!

Application:

What enabled Gideon, Samson, and everyone else mentioned in Hebrews 11 to conquer their trials?

One thing is for sure... It wasn't their righteousness. They were all very flawed human beings. Their stories sound like fodder for an HBO mini-series...

Gideon initially tried to avoid God's call to leadership.

Barak cowardly refused to take up arms without the support of Deborah.

Samson was ruled by his sexual appetites....

Jephthah rashly vowed away his daughter's life in exchange for military victory...

David committed adultery and murder.

Samuel was a miserable failure as a father... (1 Sam. 2, 8)

Speaking of Hebrews 11, one author writes,

“They had fluctuating faith and questionable morality, but they continued to trust God to be faithful to his promises, if they could act in faith and see God work, so could the sermon-letter's first hearers...” (Johnson, 179)

Let's go back to verse 33.

Hebrews 11:33 (ESV) — 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Notice what the author of Hebrews does not say.... He does not say, through acts of righteousness they conquered kingdoms... no, it was through faith... through faith these people conquered their trials...

You don't have to be perfect to conquer the trials of life... you just need to be convinced that God's promises are true.

You need to be convinced that God is near.
You need to be convinced that God is at work.
You need to be convinced that God is good.
You need to be convinced that God forgives.
You need to be convinced that God is powerful.

If you really believe these things, you can conquer your trials by faith.

What trials do you face this week???

Financial trials, Health trials, Relational trials, work trials, parenting trials, or some other trial.

You can conquer these trials through faith. In other words, you can honor God in the midst of these trials.

This does not mean that your life will be easy. Which brings us to the next point.

First, faith empowered them to conquer trials.

Second, faith empowered them to suffer well. (11: 35b-38)

How did they suffer? They were persecuted.

Hebrews 11:35–36 (ESV) — 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.

Some of the OT saints were tortured....

The original audience knew persecution firsthand. You can read about it in Hebrews 10.

How else did they suffer? They were martyred.

Hebrews 11:37 (ESV) — 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—

In 2 Chronicles. 24:17-22... King Joash had Zechariah stoned to death...

Jewish historians teach that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two by the order of King Manasseh.

Sadly, many of the OT prophets were mistreated or murdered by the leaders of Israel (1 Kings 19:10, Jer. 26:20-23).

How else did they suffer? They were exiled.

Hebrews 11:37–38 (ESV) — 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.

Some of the OT saints had to wander about in animal skins, a sign of poverty, and live in mountain caves. Why? Persecution...

How did the OT saints endure such suffering? They believed in the resurrection.

Hebrews 11:35 (ESV) — 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.

The first half of verse 35 is probably a reference to the two women whose children were brought back to life under the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

The second half of verse 35 is just as amazing. These OT saints were willing to be tortured because they knew that they would rise “to a better life.”

In other words, they believed by faith, that after the resurrection their lives would be better. How much better? They did not know. But we do. In the NT, we learn how much better our lives will be better when Christ returns, and we rise from the grave.

For instance,

When we rise from the grave, we will receive glorified resurrection bodies.

When we rise from the grave, we will live in the glories of the new creation for all eternity.

When we rise from the grave, there will be no more cancer, starvation, violence, arthritis, or family conflict.

When we rise from the grave, we will see our loved ones in the faith.

When we rise from the grave, we will see God face to face.

This puts all suffering into proper perspective.

2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV) — 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

By faith, we can suffer well as we hold onto the promise of resurrection and a better life to come. I don't know what I would do without this hope. Do you???

Application:

The original audience was suffering from persecution...

How have you suffered recently???

Maybe mild forms of persecution, sickness, stress, family dysfunction, an oppressive boss, sick children, a very difficult marriage, crippling depression, insomnia, etc...

I received this email on Friday from an out of state pastor (I have changed the names)

Brothers,

I'm writing to ask for prayer. Our sixth grandchild is due in February, the first pregnancy for our daughter Sara and her husband James. Their baby girl is at 31-weeks gestation, but we have known since the first trimester that she will not survive. She has Limb-body wall complex. She has one leg, which is the smallest of her problems. Her vital organs are outside of her body and, therefore, she will not be able to sustain life once the umbilical cord is cut. They are prepared as they can be, knowing they will not bring their baby home from the hospital. Instead they continue to embrace the privilege they have to right now provide a safe place for their little girl, and love her for as many days as the Lord has ordained for her. We are walking through this valley with them, and are thankful that they know Christ, and are knowing Him more deeply each day.

The time to release her has come earlier than expected. Our daughter is now in labor. If it is God's gracious will, they have been asking Him to enable their little princess to survive the birthing process, so that they might have a few minutes with her. Please pray for this precious little one and for all of us as we walk through this valley together.

By grace, Mike...

The only hope for this family and for us is the hope of the resurrection.

Dave, I know I will rise from the grave in the future, but what do I do in the meantime? You wait patiently... this brings us to the last point.

*First, faith empowered them to conquer trials.
Second, faith empowered them to suffer well.*

Third, faith empowered them to wait patiently.

What were they waiting for? The Messiah!

Hebrews 11:39–40 (ESV) — 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.

What were the OT saints promised? Many things. But the greatest promise was the promise of the Messiah (Jesus Christ).

The OT saints did not receive their salvation until Christ came. Why??? Verse 40 tells us. Verse 40 teaches that the OT saints would not be made perfect apart from us being made perfect.

What does this mean? It simply means this... under the Old Covenant no one was made perfect since Christ had not come. But when Christ came, he died for all of his people, including the OT saints.

In other words, he died for all of his sheep, the whole family, the whole team, at the same time. He did not die for the OT saints, die again for the NT saints, and then die again for us.

When he died, he died for all the saints, at the same time. He died 2000 years after Abraham, 1000 years after King David, and 2000 years before us.

Salvation is communal. The OT saints could not be made perfect until we were made perfect and we were all made perfect when Christ lived, died, and rose again.

Here is the point... The OT saints had to wait patiently for their salvation.

Illustration:

Waiting is hard isn't it?

Do you remember waiting to open Christmas presents when you were a child?

Do you remember waiting to get your driver's license?

Waiting to graduate from high school?

Waiting to get your first job?

Waiting to get married?

Waiting for your kids to leave the home?

Waiting for the grandkids to come?

Waiting for retirement?

Some of you are waiting to die and be with the Lord?

The great theologian Tom Petty once said, "You take it on faith, you take to the heart, but the waiting is the hardest part."

Application:

No one likes to wait... The OT saints had to wait.

Hebrews 11:39 (ESV) — 39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Under the Old Covenant they had to wait for the coming Messiah.

We live under the New Covenant. The Messiah has come. No more waiting (in one sense).

He has broken the power of sin, he has conquered death, he has defeated the devil, and he has inaugurated the new covenant.

Someday he will return and make all things new, wipe away every tear, and execute perfect justice.

This means that we still have to wait. We wait for Christ to return.

But we have it way better than the OT saints. They were citizens of the Old Covenant. They did not have as many resources to help them wait.

We are citizens of the New Covenant.

As we wait for the resurrection we can live by faith.

Faith in what??? Faith in the promises of the New Covenant as outlined in Hebrews 8, 10.

Under the New Covenant...

God has promised to write his laws on our hearts.

God has promised to fill us with his Spirit.

God has promised to draw near to us.

God has promised to forgive all our sins.

Do you believe these promises? Do you believe what you believe? If we really believe, in these present new covenant realities, we can wait.

Conclusion:

Faith empowers us to conquer trials.

Faith empowers us to suffer well.

Faith empowers us to wait patiently.

This brings us to the end of Hebrews chapter 11.

This chapter is known as the hall of fame of faith.

This hall of faith contains a very diverse group of people.

Male and female

Rich and poor

Jews and gentiles

Success and failures

Kings and peasants

Prophets and scoundrels

Loved and hated

How did all these people make the list? Why are they great heroes?

One word- Faith!!!

Only one thing gets people into Hebrews chapter 11, and it is not perfection. It is Faith

We think so many things are important; clothes, houses, careers, hobbies, cars, reputations, business success, vacation homes, and our bodies. But really only one thing matters... faith!!!

Faith gets us everything that matters.

Unbelief takes away everything that matters.

Only one thing got all these broken people into Hebrews 11 and only one thing we will get you into Heaven.

Faith!!!

Faith in the promises of God.

Faith gets broken people into God's kingdom and faith helps broken people persevere until the end.

Let's pray...