



## “The Two Faces Of Faith” (Hebrews 11:32-40)

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Intro: If I counted correctly, we’ve spent a total of nine weeks in Hebrews 11, and in that time we’ve looked at a number of characters in biblical history that responded to God in faith – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses’ parents, Moses, the people’s corporate faith. The last character we looked at is one of my favorites – Rahab (a “sinderella” story).

At this point the Holy Spirit moves the writer to quickly mention more who responded to God in faith, and as a result not only performed heroic exploits, but some even experienced miraculous intervention from heaven on their behalf. Gideon – for seven years the Midianites had been oppressing Israel. The Bible says that it was so bad the Israelites were hiding in clefts, caves, and strongholds. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he sent a prophet to rebuke them for their sin. After this, “the angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash...where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress. Gideon was God’s choice to lead the Israelites to victory over the Midianites. The angel of the Lord greets Gideon this way – “the Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” But at the time Gideon was anything but a mighty warrior. However, he would become one, by faith. He told the angel of the Lord “my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (as if the angel of the Lord didn’t know!). The angel assures him that he will be with him, and he will strike down the Midianites. Gideon asks for a sign, then prepares an offering. The angel tells him to place the offering on a rock, and when he does the angel touches the offering with his staff and it is consumed by fire that flared from the rock. (That’s a pretty clear sign!) He is then told to go and tear down his father’s altars to Baal and Asherah and build an altar to the Lord in their place. He does it, but because “he was afraid of his family and the men of the town,” he does it at night. He later asks for another sign from the Lord – “I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry...” That’s exactly what God did. But it wasn’t good enough for Gideon. He asks the Lord to do it again, only this time make the fleece dry and the ground wet. God does this as well. Finally, it’s time to go fight the Midianites. But first he is told to tell any of the men who are afraid to go home if they like. Gideon’s probably thinking “Great, see ya later!” When he makes his announcement to the thirty two thousand men before him, twenty-two thousand take God up on his offer! God says that’s still too many, and reduces the number to – Do you know how many? (Three hundred). Chapter seven, verses 10 and 11 tell us that Gideon is still afraid, but he moves ahead with the mustard seed faith that he has.

Then God gives the plan for victory. Each man has a trumpet and a clay jar. When Gideon gives the signal, they are to break their jars, blow their trumpets, and shout “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!” (Note: There is no indication anywhere in the story that anyone actually had a physical sword). Gideon gives the signal, they break their clay jars and shout, and God gives a miraculous victory over an innumerable Midianite army! Gideon went from being super chicken to super hero!

Judges chapter four tells the story of Barak, another coward who overcame fear by faith. Accompanied by Deborah the prophetess (because Barak was afraid to go alone), God gave Barak and Deborah a miraculous victory over the Canaanites. For twenty years they had oppressed Israel, and Israel cries to God for help. Barak was God’s chosen agent for deliverance.

Samson is one of my favorite Bible characters. After twenty years of performing great exploits by the power of God, he was subdued and captured by the Philistines, all because he never dealt with issues of pride, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes. But even though he ends up blind, bound, and humiliated before the enemy, his life ends in triumph (summarize). His story ends with this statement, “Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.”

Jephtah’s story is found in Judges 10-11. He was a bastard son whose mother was a prostitute. He was despised by his brothers, and when they had grown up they kicked him out of their family. At the time the Ammonites were oppressing Israel, and they cried to the Lord for help. Jephtah was God’s chosen agent for deliverance. One statement sums up the tremendous victory the Lord brought about through him – “and the Lord gave them into his hands.”

And who does not know about David? (Summarize his story).

Samuel was one of God’s most faithful prophets whose whole life was devoted to delivering God’s Word and standing for truth. His mother (Hannah) was for years barren, but she earnestly prayed, making a vow to the Lord that, if he would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord his entire life. God granted her request, and she fulfilled her vow. As a young boy Samuel served at the temple under the direction of Eli the priest. Eli’s sons were wicked, and Eli was a very lax priest and father. Samuel’s ministry as a prophet began by God telling him to prophecy against Eli and his family as a result of their sin. Samuel would later anoint the first king of Israel (Saul), and soon afterward rebuke the king for his unfaithfulness to the Lord. Samuel died an old man, having begun well as a young boy, and finishing well as an aged saint.

The prophets – Elijah (highlights?), Elisha (twice as many recorded miracles as Elijah; asked for a double portion of the blessing of his master). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The widow of Zarephath (Elijah), the Shunammite’s son (Elisha).

These are the stories we love to tell, hear, and read about. These are the kinds of movies that we like to watch. These are the characters that everyone imagines themselves being. But look with me at the rest of our text...

Then there are the “others (vv.35b-40). Jeremiah was imprisoned and tortured (Jer.20:1-6; 37:15; 38:4-6). "Haggadah" refers to the homiletic and non-legal teachings recorded in Rabbinic literature. A haggadah entitled “Ascension of Messiah” asserts that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two by false prophets of Manasseh, who stood by laughing and rejoicing. This same record states that Isaiah “neither cried aloud nor wept, but his lips spake with the Holy Spirit until he was sawn in twain.”

II Maccabees details the gruesome torture of a ninety year old priest, Elezar, who refused to eat swine’s flesh, and goes on to tell of seven brothers tortured for the same reason. The period of The Maccabees was the time when the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted and murdered Jews in ways that can be rivaled only by the Holocaust of Hitler’s day.

Other historical records tell us that some believers were fastened to a device and stretched little by little until their joints were pulled out of the sockets.

Jesus said of those born of women, none was greater than John the Baptist. He had the unique privilege of introducing the Savior (Jesus) to the world. Yet when imprisoned for his faithfulness to God, Jesus never even paid him a visit. John would never leave that prison, he was beheaded by Herod. Note what Jesus said about John (a reed shaken by the wind?).

Foxes Book Of Christian Martyrs tells one harrowing tale after another of the world’s assault on believers throughout history.

What is described here is not simply suffering, but acute, brutal, ultimate suffering. But despite their suffering, these saints endured – by faith.

Things We Should Take Note Of:

1. Their faith was commended by God, even though they performed no great exploits, or experienced any miracles from heaven.
  - “The performing of spectacular exploits and the enduring of terrible affliction differ almost as much to the flesh as do heaven and hell, but they are one to faith when duty calls.” (Pink, p.877).
  - The same, just a different face. There are two faces of faith illustrated for us here. The one is that of deliverance, of earthly resurrection, of escape and victory over the enemies faced in this life. But the other face of faith is one that endures even the most cruel and painful treatment that the world and hell itself can throw at the believer. It perseveres no matter how great the pain.
  - “So this is also a result of faith, not that it brings deliverance...but that sometimes, when deliverance is offered, it gives...courage to refuse it...There is a deliverance that faith embraces. There is a deliverance that faith rejects...”

2. The world was not worthy of these “others”

- God looks at these saints who endured such suffering in this world as the greatest of heaven’s heroes!
- The world did not realize how blessed they were to have these saints in their midst. And it is the same today.
- Psalm 16: 3 As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.
- Matthew 5: 13 "You are the salt of the earth..." (prevents decay/corruption).
- Matthew 5: 14 "You are the light of the world...(dispels darkness)
- Gen.19: 22 But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it...24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah--from the LORD out of the heavens. (delays divine judgment).
- Gen.30: 27 But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you."
- Gen.39: 5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. (brings blessing from heaven).
- Christianity has always impacted history in very positive ways, yet the world is so foolishly blind, hating the very ones through whom the blessings of life and the hope of eternity come...

3. They gained “a better resurrection” as a result of their perseverance in faith, despite great suffering and loss.

- See Isaiah 57:1-2
- Phil.1:23... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body
- To be killed for refusing to give in to the threats of one’s persecutors, and then have God raise you from the dead in this present world, means that you will once again have to face the same world that caused you so much pain. As a Christian, to leave this world at a time that on the surface seems premature, once on the other side becomes crystal clear that it was a blessing. Could I remind us all of something – those saints we love who have for whatever reason been taken from us at a time we consider “too soon,” if they had the opportunity to return, they would not. The pain is on this side. On the other side is nothing but glory!

- Daniel 3:17-18; They never sacrificed the future on the altar of the immediate.
4. The faith these “others” manifested marks the pinnacle of faith that pleases God.
- These sufferings mark the pinnacle of faith’s attainments. Why? Because “a willingness to suffer manifests a faith that is completely subject to God, that bows submissively to whatever He is pleased to send, which has been so completely won to Him that torture and death are deliberately chosen...over apostasy...to be faithful unto death, to have unshakable confidence in the Lord, though He suffers us to be slain, to trust Him when to sight and sense it seems He has deserted us, is the highest exercise all of faith.” (Pink, p.878). And that is why God places these verses last in this great chapter!
  - It is one thing to believe God for a miracle. It is quite another to believe God when the miracle does not come!
  - Job 13: 15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.
  - Revelation 12:11

## CONCLUSION

- Can you imagine being at the judgment seat of Christ, and as you’re waiting for the judging to begin, you mingle among the crowd, and you bump into one of these heroes. They tell you their story, then ask you to tell them about your faith experiences while on earth. I don’t really like thinking about that, because I think I’ve had a pretty easy ride on the path of faith God has laid out for me. With that said, I have no idea what lies ahead. If I did, I might not like it so much...
- I know that every one of us in here want to be recorded in The Who’s Who of Heaven. And we would love to have our record reflect stories of the miraculous, of great exploits, of miracles! But the truth is, some of us will be called to manifest faith that endures tremendous pain, that suffers great loss. Perhaps you’ve already arrived there.
- Rom.8: 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
- We need to pray. Now, I’m going to give you three choices – you can pray on your own (in your seat or here down front); you can stand and join 3-5 people and pray together; you can come to one our prayer team and let them pray for you. Some of us need to pray for forgiveness. Jesus said to Peter, “Satan has desired to sift you as wheat.” Peter knows what it’s like to fail, he denied the Lord three times. And why did he do that? Because he was not willing to suffer the consequences of his confession. That’s where some of us are today. After Peter failed, the Bible says Jesus turned and looked at Peter eye to eye. And Peter went outside and wept bitterly. Others of us are on the doorstep of suffering, and we need to pray for strength to endure. Finally, some of us are in the fire. We need to pray that God would bring us through the fire, and that we would be found faithful.