

## Supreme Faith Hebrews 11:35-40

### Introduction

The 11th chapter of Hebrews contains the trials and triumphs of faith. We have carefully looked at the explanation of faith (vv.1-3;6) and examples of faith (vv.4-5; 7-40). We have looked at the heroes of faith from Abel to Samuel and all the prophets (v.32). We looked at what they did—Abel offering an acceptable offering; Enoch left the earth without dying; Noah survived a great flood; Abraham inherited a land; Sarah bore a son through a barren womb; Isaac and Jacob predicted the future; Joseph anticipated the Exodus; Moses defied the King of Egypt; and Moses forsook the pleasures of sin and identified with the people of God.

We have in brief looked at why they endured (they saw an invisible city—the City of God; v.10; vv.13-15; 16); they believed suffering for the sake of Christ was better than all the riches of this world (v.26) and looked forward to their own resurrection (v.35c). Now the author tells us what the heroes of faith endured; torture (v.35); ridicule (v.36) cruel beatings (v.36b); imprisonment (36c); stoning (v.37a); being sawn in half (v.37b); death by sword (v.37c); extreme poverty (vv. 37-38). Knowing why they endured—and what they endured the writer concludes the section with a glimpse of what they received in the past—the earthly and temporal approval of God (see v.16a—and v.39); and in the future—the heavenly and eternal approval of God (v.40).

I think we are hard wired by God to seek His approval. In one sense this approval sometimes manifests itself in our desire to be approved of by our father or family or friends. Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr adopted the famous serenity prayer when he wrote; “God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other other.” Paul writing to the Ephesians reminded them that God in Christ had chosen the believer before the foundation of the world; “that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, (v.5) having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:4-6). Paul Tillich famously said; “Accept the fact that you are accepted”.

The passage contains no names. These were ordinary men and women. They were not necessarily leaders. They were not necessarily noted by this world or even the people living closest to them. They may have not been noticed by the movers and shakers of this world; but their lives were followed closely by the living God. They had one distinctive trait—they believed God and their faith in God and in God’s promises remained strong!

“They endured in faith no matter what attacked them. They never accepted defeat; therefore they were never defeated. They never denied God; therefore they were never denied by God. They never lost hope; therefore they were never left hopeless. They endured in faith. No matter the circumstance, difficulty, threat, injury, pain, torture, or form of execution and death, they endured and held fast to their faith and profession in God” (*The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible Hebrews/James; p.168*).

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### Looking Forward To The Resurrection (v.35)

*Hebrews 11:35–40 (NKJV)* 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

We know the widow from Zarephath received her son back from the dead through the ministry of Elijah (1 Kings 17:22). Others were tortured (see woman of Shunem—2 Kings 4:34). The word tortured seems to describe the method of torture—beaten to death while strapped to some sort of rack (MacArthur p.1872) which has caused some to think it may be a reference to the Maccabees (Craig Keener). The story is told in the second book of the Maccabees (chapters 6-7—Eleazar and the mother with her seven sons who were martyrs).

Antiochus Epiphanes IV outlawed circumcision. A woman defied the edict and had her son circumcised. The mother watched as all seven of her sons were put to death.

The Greeks would use fire and thumbscrews—stretching on a wheel to break the joints; then beat the victim to death—by pounding on the stomach as if beating a drum (see Keener p.677).

It is one thing to be delivered from seems like certain death and another thing to come back from the dead.

Why are some delivered and others remain to suffer?

Sometimes it pleases God to shelter some from suffering. Sometimes it pleases God to lead the saints through suffering! **This does not mean He delivers some of His people and deserts the others.** “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him—and delivers them. . .many are the afflictions of the righteous: but Jehovah delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:7-9).

In the book of Acts James is beheaded and Peter set free (Acts 12:1-7). James was delivered through death—**and he never suffered ever again!** Peter was set free—only to experience further trial—further tests—further—suffering!

Why do the righteous suffer? Why did Christ suffer? Why does God permit it? Surely He could prevent the suffering? Is it because He does not love His people? Is it because God is not faithful? How then do you explain the passage of Scripture that says Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end? Paul gives us a clue to the answer; (Colossians 1:24); “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church”. Clearly some things are difficult—but whatever this means—it cannot mean that Christ did not suffer enough—but rather God—permits suffering—even for a season—every baby born—will eventually cry. But mothers will risk and sacrifice—to insure that baby’s birth. And in the spiritual world—spiritual birth—is often accompanied by suffering. The Church of God—and members of that body—are

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coming into existence—by spiritual birth! The body grows—when people are born again—when a person believes Christ—and receives Christ. Paul is willing to labor (suffer) to insure—a healthy birth. Paul says—I will accept my portion of the suffering. We must fill up—that which is behind—in the afflictions of Christ. In what way? Why can't the suffering of Jesus insure that no believers—ever have to suffer? Clearly nothing lacks in the life of Jesus. Clearly nothing lacks in the atonement of Jesus. What lacks—is the necessary griefs and sacrifices that go into bringing Jesus—to a broken world—and broken people. This why Peter said—“Beloved—do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you—but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12, 13).

Why in the world did God permit—the murder of James—and the release of Peter? The answer seems to be that God's purposes and glory would be better served by the death of one and the release of the other!

In the past and in the present some Christians are subjected to cruel torture. And some were offered a choice; renounce Jehovah—renounce the God of Israel and go free. But they refused to accept deliverance—better to die and be raised in glory than to live the life of a traitor here on the earth.

That kind of courage seems foreign to so many. G. H. Morrison writes;

“So this is also a result of faith, not that it brings deliverance to a man, but that sometimes, when deliverance is offered, it gives him a fine courage to refuse it. There are seasons when faith shows itself in taking. There are seasons when it is witnessed in refusing. There is a deliverance that faith embraces. There is a deliverance that faith rejects. They were tortured, not accepting deliverance—that was a sign and seal they were faithful. There are hours when the strongest proof of faith is the swift rejection of the larger room.”

What would denying the Lord do? For some it meant living a few more days, or months or years. But death would come to all—eventually.

Jesus is the author of life.

### **Looking Back At The Momentary Affliction (vv.36-38)**

*36Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.*

The Old Testament reads like a who's who of people mocked for their faith Joseph and his dreams (Gen.39:20); Micaiah (1 Kings 22:27); Elisha (2 Kings 2:23) and Hanani (2 Chron. 16:10); Jeremiah (20:1-6).

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*37They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—*

The Lord Jesus reminded the religious leaders that their ancestors murdered the prophets; (Matthew 23:34) “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, (35) that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. (36) “Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” Jesus cried out and said, Jerusalem, Jerusalem—the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to you!

According to Jewish tradition Isaiah towards the end of his life hid in a tree—and the wicked King Manasseh had the tree with Isaiah still in that tree—sawn in half.

The description includes homeless “being destitute” that means no resources.

The passage is of course embarrassing to those who insist that God’s people must always be healthy and wealthy. But it is hard to ignore the passages that remind us that sometimes God’s people experience extreme poverty and extreme persecution.

The contrast of course is plenty—in this world. Plenty of clothes, plenty of resources, much pleasure, if you will simply go along to get along.

The invitation is to accept this world’s lies and reject God’s promises.

This world can strip of us of all that this world finds valuable. They can strip us of our clothing. They can take away our homes. They can confiscate our property. They can afflict and torture as much as possible. They can force us to live in deserts, wilderness, in dens or caves.

But it is impossible to take our wealth. Jesus promises never to leave. Jesus said, “Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake” (Matt.5:11). Jesus said, “You shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake; but he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matt.10:22). “And every one that has forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children, or lands for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt.19:29).

2 Corinthians 4:11; “For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” Paul compares his own constant persecution and suffering with that of Jesus, in whose dying and resurrection life the apostle will consequently share.

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Your wealth is Jesus. Your wealth is amassed as you experience His shame and suffering. “For unto it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1:29).

*38of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.*

The passage tells us that these saints wandered in deserts and mountains—dispossessed of homes and homeland. Dens and caves seeking some shelter from the harsh and cruel conditions of this world—the saints—separated from families, pursued like animals, expelled from society, rejected—enduring heat and cold, distress and hardship—all the while—invited to reject the living Lord of the Universe—but would not!

And what pray tell is the world’s assessment of these men and women of faith? The world sees believers as pests, irritants, ignorant, but some see us as harmful. God says; “of whom the world was not worthy”. The world says; “not worthy to live”. The Spirit of God turns the table and says this world is not worthy of them!

### **Looking Forward To God’s Approval And God’s Promise (vv.39-40)**

*39And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,*

What does this mean? Through faith “these, having obtained a good testimony through faith” that is they believed God’s promises—did not receive “the promise”—that is Christ—they had faith that God would fulfill His promises concerning the land and the Messiah.

These Old Testament saints did not live to see the coming of the Christ—the ministry of Jesus and His sacrifice and His resurrection from the dead.

*40God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*

The original language is interesting; God having provided (*verb—problepo—only here*) literally means to see ahead or see beforehand we might think anticipate—but anticipate with certainty. The Lord foresaw and ‘planned’ for this very thing!

What was God’s plan for the Old Testament Saint? That they would share with the New Testament Saint in that New Covenant through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what is the “something better for us”?

You know the answer!

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Jesus is so much better (1:4); Jesus is the better person (7:7); a better hope (7:22); the Mediator of a better Covenant (7:22) with better promises (8:6); Jesus purifies with a better sacrifice (9:23); gives us heaven a better possession (10:34); a better country (heaven)(11:16); a better resurrection (11:35); providing better things (11:35; 11:40; 12:24).

Jesus is our better Savior (3:1-8:5); we have a better security (8:6-13); we have a better sanctuary (9:1-12); and a better sacrifice (9:13-10:39). The writer of Hebrews gives us answers to what was wrought in that sacrifice—sought in that sacrifice—taught—in that sacrifice. It is in that context that the writer of Hebrews speaks of these trials and triumphs.

The Old Testament Saints experienced profound trial and great triumphs. The Old Testament Saints experienced some revelations and some miracles. But our privileges far exceed their privileges. The writer of Hebrews invites us to consider their trials and their triumphs and their endurance and all they could do was anticipate Christ. Jesus has come. They could only catch a glimpse of salvation and the Cross. We see Jesus.

What does it mean that they should not be made perfect apart from us? To be made perfect is an expression that refers to completeness or wholeness—what some have called the consummation of salvation (1:14)—“the resurrection of the dead” (v.35). According to the book of Daniel all the righteous dead will one day be raised together at the very end of the age (Daniel 12:2, 13).

## **Conclusion**

Some victories were public. Most were private. Some were delivered by faith and others were given grace and faith to bear suffering. We are called to walk in faith.

## **What have we learned in this amazing chapter?**

**God works through faith and faith alone. But it is a faith that never remains alone.**

**Exercising faith is the only way to please Him and receive His blessing.**

**Faith is a gift from God through the Word and the Spirit.**

**Faith is always tested.**

**Faith sometimes seems foolish but faith will always conquer in the end.**

**By faith Abel offers an acceptable sacrifice.**

**By faith Enoch pleases God and is taken bypassing death.**

**By faith Noah builds an ark.**

**By faith Abraham follows God, believes God’s promise of a son—and offers that son as a sacrifice.**

**By faith Isaac blesses his sons’ futures.**

**By faith Joseph speaks prophetically of the exodus from Egypt.**

**By faith Moses chooses God’s people over Egypt and keeps the Passover.**

**By faith Rahab keeps the Israeli spies safe.**

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**By faith Gideon won a great battle against the enemies of Israel**

**By faith Barak and Sampson and Jephthah fought and defeated God's enemies.**

**By faith David was a man after God's own heart.**

**By faith Samuel was a prophet and judge of Israel.**

**By faith—we believe Jesus—trust Jesus—follow Jesus—obey Jesus—love Jesus.**