

Triumphant Faith

Heb. 11:32-40

Series: "More"

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I want to go ahead and jump into our text this morning. I'm calling the message: **Triumphant Faith**

We have two weeks left in our *MORE* series, and the writer of Hebrews is bringing this section of scripture we call the *Hall of Faith* to a close. What we are about to read here in (v. 32-40) is a conclusion...he's tying a bow (if you will) on all that he has written thus far concerning faith, and the men and women who have modeled what it means to live by faith.

Heb. 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.”

There are three sections in this series of verses:

The first section is (v. 32-35a) – this describes what I would call: “a faith that delivers”. The second section (v. 35b-38) describes what I would call: “a faith that endures.” And then the final two verses in Hebrews 11 (v. 39-40) bring these two sections together in a fitting way.

Let's look at it...a lot to unpack here today, but this is going to be a good and I believe a needed word for all of us.

Now, I confess that if you have been coming to services or listening in on these messages since we started, you could be tempted to think that if you live a life of faith – EVERYTHING is going to work out well for you from a physical, material, worldly standpoint.

Afterall, every person we have read and studied about up to this point, you could say that their life: what they accomplished...what they were able to be a part of...what they witnessed was pretty spectacular!

- Noah and his family saved from the flood...
- Abraham and Sarah have their promised child...

- Moses saw the Red Sea split in two and he leads the Israelites out of slavery...
- The Israelites captured Jericho without having to hardly lift a finger...
- Rahab is saved and ends up in the genealogy of Jesus...

I mean for the MOST part, living a life of faith has worked out EXTREMELY well for those that we have read about, and it seems to continue that way into (v. 32-35a). Look at it again:

Heb. 11:32-35a – “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...”

This is what I call a: **Faith that Delivers**

The writer mentions the names of six people here and summarizes in his description the time of period of the Judges, the kings and the prophets – and just listen to their victories...talk about a faith that delivers!

- Conquering kingdoms...
- Stopping the mouths of lions...
- Quenching the power of fire...
- Escaping the edge of the sword...

This is incredible! And the scripture says all of these feats were accomplished by faith and through faith!

And the writer doesn't hardly go into detail on any of these stories – he just gives some names and descriptors. He's like, “it's not worth the writer's cramp! You KNOW these stories...you KNOW these people I'm talking about -what they did...how God used them!

He knows simply by mentioning some of these things, the stories would have been easily recollected in the minds of the Jewish believers receiving this letter.

- Stop the mouths of lions – that's Daniel!
- Quenching the power of fire – that's Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego!

And in using these names and examples, he is inspiring these believers to keep going...to not give up...he wants them to know that they serve a God who delivers.

In sharing these names and stories from the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews wants the people reading this letter...he wants their faith to be strengthened – that in the midst of the persecution they are experiencing...in the midst of the difficulty of following Jesus, if they will live by faith, theirs IS a faith that delivers.

I mean just reading these feats wouldn't that make you want to hang in there if you were in a tough time?! And make no mistake, these believers were in a tough spot.

Remember the context! Turn back to:

Heb. 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.”

These people receiving this letter knew what it was to suffer. They knew what it was to be afflicted...to be mistreated...to be taken advantage of...to have their homes plundered and their possessions taken!

What encouragement this must have been to be reminded of these Old Testament saints that were miraculously delivered...that accomplished great victories against overwhelming odds.

Just the names mentioned...those six names, we won't go into detail in their lives and stories (the writer of Hebrews didn't – he expected his listeners to know their story – go back and read about their lives) – you want to know what all of those listed have in common? Two things:

First, they did something GREAT for God, but check this, they had one more thing in common: they were men of weakness...they were imperfect people.

- Gideon – Sure, he led a massive victory for Israel over the Midianites, but the dude was insecure as one could get!
- Barak – He had a great military victory over King Sisera, but had zero confidence in himself and he would have never gone to war if it wasn't for a woman named Deborah challenging his manhood and encouraging to do what God commanded him to do.
- Samson – He super-human strength, but was impulsive, driven by his flesh, couldn't hardly say “no” to temptation, and sin ultimately cost him everything – his freedom, his eyesight, his life!
- Jephthah – He led Israel to a victory over the Ammonites, but he sure had a past! He was the son of prostitute...and his half-brothers drove him away not wanting to have anything to do with him.
- David – He was a giant-slayer, a warrior, a king. But he was also an adulterer and murderer...
- Samuel – He was an incredible prophet...he also was a horrible father. His two sons, Joel and Abijah were corrupt and greedy to the core...

ALL these men had their issues. They were imperfect people with imperfect pasts and questionable character in some cases! What does this say to us?

It says to us that having a faith that delivers, doesn't depend on you or me, it depends on God! Secondly, notice – NOT one time is the amount of faith mentioned...the scripture doesn't say if you have a HUGE amount of faith, you get delivered – it DOESN'T say this!

Very important to note that a faith that delivers is NOT dependent on the individual being awesome or sinless or some kind of saint with super faith! ALL of the people given as an example to us in (v. 32-35 – and you could say throughout all of Heb. 11) were weak and imperfect people who served as really big God.

It's not about a certain amount of faith or the writer would have certainly made that clear.

Listen to this: A faith that delivers is TOTALLY dependent on the sovereignty of God. VERY IMPORTANT because of this next section of scripture.

(v. 32-35a) – it's a faith that delivers.

(v. 35b-38) – it's a faith that endures.

Let's look at it, and keep in mind what we're coming off of - victory after victory, even the first part of (v. 35) informing us that through faith women received back their dead via resurrection – two instances in mind here: one with Elijah and the widow at Zarephath - her son was raised from the dead (1 Kings 17). The other Elisha and the raising of the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4).

Again, all sounds amazing...a faith that delivers! But now we come to what I'm calling: **A Faith that Endures**

Heb. 11:35b-38 – “...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.”

Now, up to this point, I liked where the writer of Hebrews was going. If I was hearing this letter read for the first time, I would be saying to myself, “YES! I like this! Through faith, we raise the dead! Enforce justice! Stop the mouths of lions! Go into fires and NOT be burned – THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!

But, now...the writer just pulled the emergency break...the “good endings” so to speak have ended!

Notice, right in the middle of (v. 35) there's a shift. The writer doesn't change subjects...he doesn't start a new paragraph...he just keeps going.

His intent is to give us a FULL picture of what faith looks like. It's no longer victories and surprise, miraculous deliverances – now, we're talking torture, imprisonment and death FOR people living by faith!

Interesting, isn't it?! What are we to do with this? THIS...is a sobering reality...that you could live by faith, eyes on the Lord, following hard after him, doing everything you know to be faithful and true – and yet it NOT work out for you from a physical, material, worldly standpoint.

That's a tough reality to come to grips with, but it IS a reality. This is true from Christian history and it's true today – AND it should not be a surprise to us.

Jesus and the rest of the New Testament writers warned that suffering and persecution could come as a result of following him! They wanted us to be prepared...just listen to these verses:

(Jesus) **John 15:18-20a** – “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...”

(Peter) **1 Peter 4:12-14** – “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.¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

(John/Smyrna) **Rev. 2:10** – “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

(Paul) **1 Thess. 3:3-4** – “that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.”

Illus. Nigerian Christians – And listen: lest we think this is just ancient history or some kind of hypothetical warning - Right now...this very week...Christians in Nigeria are experiencing exactly what Hebrews 11 describes.

Militant groups like Boko Haram are forcing believers from their homes, killing pastors, burning churches. Since 2009, 50,000-100,000 Christians have been murdered in Nigeria. At least 7,000 Christians have been killed this year alone – that's an average of 35 deaths each day. 19,000 churches have been destroyed.

Some Christians are being delivered miraculously. Others are having to endure - losing everything, even their lives - because they refuse to deny Jesus. Persecution and suffering for the sake of Christ is real!

Now, to be clear, NOWHERE does the Bible tell us to seek persecution out...we also shouldn't be suffering because we are insufferable!

Some people think they are experiencing persecution when in reality they are just being a jerk! The hardship isn't coming because of your faith, it's coming because you're difficult.

That's not what I'm talking about...that's not what the New Testament warned of.

The persecution...the suffering...the affliction...the torment mentioned in (v. 35-38) ...the imprisonment...the flogging...the death – this is ALL a result of and the consequences of living by faith.

- People wanted Christians to bow the knee to Caesar, and Christians refused...
- Christians refused to participate in behavior that didn't honor the name of their God and as a result it convicted those were participating in those behaviors and as a result, they lied and slandered Christians costing them jobs and property and some of their possessions...
- Christians taught there was ONE WAY to God, and Jesus was that way, and the religions and power structures of the world despised them and rejected them...
- Christian history and extrabiblical literature teach that the prophets, Jeremiah and Zechariah were stoned for speaking truth to power and the prophet Isaiah was sawed in two.
- Old Testament saints because of their faith in God were forced from their homes and living in caves and dens because of their commitment to following the one, true God.

And note what the writer says about these people – he says in (v. 38) – “of whom the world was not worthy...”

Amazing that in (Heb. 11:34) some who lived by faith “escaped the edge of the sword, but then others (Heb. 11:37) were “killed with the sword”. What made the difference?

Again, it wasn't the individual...it wasn't the amount of faith an individual had...what made the difference? The sovereignty of God.

Illus. Tomb of Unknown Soldier (SHOW PIC) - This week we are honoring our Veterans, and one of the most powerful monuments in our nation is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. If you've never been, I hope you can go sometime. It's moving for a number of reasons but primarily because it represents every soldier - known and unknown - who gave everything for something greater than themselves.

It's kind of like Hebrews 11:32-38 here. You have tombs all over Arlington with names and you have others who go unnamed, some who made it back safely and some who did not.

Now, I can't explain why some soldiers made it home, and others didn't. Just like I can't explain...no one can...why God allows some in this world experiencing suffering and persecution and hardship for their faith to be delivered and why others simply have to endure – that's in the hands of God – our job is to simply trust him.

You know when I preach a message like this one, I'm always reminded of people I know in our congregation – I could name them – people that I am praying for on a consistent basis right now.

They have cancer...or some other kind of illness...or their struggling because a beloved family member is going through it - and they all have faith! Heck, that's the only thing that's getting them and their family members through this time – it's their faith!

And I wish I could say that for all of them, they would be in that first group...in the group that is delivered by faith. That the cancer gets eradicated...that the disease goes away...that a full physical healing takes place...that death doesn't come!

The reality is though, it could be in the plans and sovereignty of God they are in the second group- the group that endures by faith.

J.D. Greear – “Sometimes God is glorified when sick people get well. Sometimes he is glorified when sick people suffer well, even die well.”

It's been said that sometimes God leads you INTO difficulty and sometimes he leads you THROUGH difficulty. In either case, it's our faith that God is after and what he is strengthening and purifying in the process.

The question, you have to answer – certainly more when you're in a faith that's enduring...that's suffering...the question you have to answer this: Is Jesus worth it?

The answer these saints gave - both those delivered and those who endured - was a resounding YES. How do we know? Because they kept going! They didn't abandon their faith when things got hard. They didn't curse God when deliverance didn't come. Their perseverance was their answer.

See, all these in the *Hall of Faith* had determined, whatever it was they were going through – it was worth it...that Jesus was worth it!

Heb. 11:39-40 – “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.”

We've seen this idea of “what was promised” throughout Hebrews 11. We see it in the very definition of faith – it's the assurance of things HOPED for, and the conviction of things not seen

(v. 1). We see it in the “better country” and the future “city” these saints were looking ahead to (v. 15-16)

The future hope and future reward they were looking to was:

- worth leaving their homeland (Abraham and Sarah) ...
- worth a better sacrifice (Abel)...
- worth walking with God when no one else was (Enoch)...
- worth being misunderstood and building an ark when it had never rained (Noah)...
- worth leaving Egypt and then coming back to confront Pharaoh (Moses)...
- worth risking their reputation and marching around Jericho (Joshua and Israel) ...

It was worth it because what was promised was worth it!

And what was that promise they were all looking to? Ultimately, it was Jesus, the Messiah...the fulfillment of every covenant...the substance behind every shadow! We have what they longed for! They looked forward to Christ, we look backward at his finished work!

There's was a future hope and future reward AND all of these people NAMED and UNNAMED...all of these people whether miraculously delivered or whether they have to suffer and endure, their faith is made perfect...it's completed with us.

What does that mean? Listen to how Charles Swindoll explains this:

Charles Swindoll – “Those ancient saints form our spiritual family tree. Without them, we have no roots. Without us, they have no branches. They are “made perfect”, or completed, as the lifegiving sap of their lives flows through our spiritual leaves and flowers fill the earth with a fragrance of faith.”

I like that! Because just as they looked ahead to Jesus by faith, we look back to Jesus by faith. It's his coming and finished work at the cross that enables us to have a faith that delivers AND a faith that endures.

So, what's the application to all this? How do we live in light of all of that we've learned today?

- 1. Trust God** – God is trustworthy. He's proved himself over and over. He can be trusted. Whether it's a faith that delivers or a faith that endures – you can't worry about that...what you can do is decide by faith that I'm going to trust God either way. He is worth it!

BTW – when you are in times that your faith is being tested...when you are in times where you are having to endure. Sometimes we give up what we know for what we don't know...that's a bad trade off!

NEVER trade what you know for what you don't know. You get a phone call to come back for tests, and your mind goes to worst case scenario. You get diagnosed with cancer, and while it's

normal and natural, if you are not careful your mind will dwell on the “unknowns”. Don’t trade what you know for what you don’t know.

What you know is that God loves you. What you know is that God has a plan for you. What you know is that God is working all things for his good and his glory. What you know is God has purpose for you in the pain. Don’t trade what you know for what you don’t know!

God can be trusted...lean on him and remember what all these saints from Hebrews 11 have taught us – Jesus is worth it! And again, they were looking ahead by faith...we look back...we have a full and final revelation!

One commentator I read this week wrote: “If they were able to trust God when they had so little revelation from Him, what are we doing for God with a completed revelation.”

That’s a great question. First application to this message today is for us to trust God – he’s earned it and is worthy of it!

Illus. Life Group question – Where else you going to go?

2. Entrust yourself and your loved ones to God

If God can be trusted – and we have established that he can, then we can entrust our lives and our loved ones to him. We can pray with confidence, “not my will be done, but yours, Oh God.”

It was **Charles Spurgeon** – “**God is too good to be unkind and too wise to be mistaken.**”

If you find yourself in a faith that is having to endure today...suffer today...trust God AND entrust yourself to him.

Illus. The Always God – “Always Faithful” section, there is a chapter called, “Trust in God” – and I talk about trust and entrust – I talk about two images that the Bible gives over and over to help me think about “trust and entrust”. I give them to you to consider if you find yourself...when you find yourself in an enduring faith moment.

The first image is that of a father. The second image is that of shepherd. You can entrust yourself fully to God because he is a loving father that only wants what’s best for you and he is a caring shepherd that will lead and guide you through.

Trust God. And entrust yourself and your loved ones to God.

3. See the bigger story being written by God

You’re a part of this! Look at verse 40 again – “apart from us they should not be made perfect.” Your faith RIGHT NOW is completing the story that started with Abel! That’s amazing to think about...the baton is now in our hand to live by faith! We continue this thing!

When we trust God in the hospital room undergoing tests or we're at the funeral home burying a loved one, when we trust God in these moments (BIG and SMALL) we're adding a branch to Abraham's tree.

When we endure hardship with hope, we're proving that what Gideon and Barak and David believed was TRUE. We're not just living our story – we're a part of THE BIGGER story that is being written by God – add us into Hebrews 11! Amazing!

I called this message *Triumphant Faith* because whether you have a faith that delivers OR a faith that endures...either way, if you have faith in our God, it will be a triumphant faith. Whether your name is ever in the lights and you are mentioned by name in the annals of Christian history or you die unknown (pretty much all of us) we die in triumphant faith.

Let's pray together.

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