

“By Faith”

Faith In Accomplishment

Sometimes if we are not careful when going through a text like Hebrews chapter 11, we can miss the forest for the trees. In other words, we can get so caught up in minute details we miss the big picture. As we wrap up Hebrews chapter 11 today, I think the Lord would have us look at the big picture concerning faith. It seems the writer of Hebrews wrote this section with that intention, for in verses 30 to 40 the minute details are spared for an overarching scope of faith. So, to understand this text in light of the author’s intent we will approach it in the same manner.

As we examined the characteristics of faith through the patriarchs; Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Moses, we observed specific acts of faith in their lives and the common theme of faith they all shared. As we prepare to unpack these verses at the end of chapter 11, I think it would do us well to return briefly to the beginning verses of Hebrews chapter 11, please open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 11, **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation.”** We have come to understand through our weeks of studying Hebrews chapter 11 that faith believes God and trusts in God regardless of the circumstances. Faith is trust in what God has said, simply because it was God who said it. Faith is unconditional trust in the promises of God. So, the concept of faith is simple, even if it is hard to live at times; my beloved, we either live our lives based on faith in God or we do not.

As was true in Jesus' time and is still the true in our time, faith does not seek after signs or prophecies showing a church or person as unique or special, or to prove Jesus is the Christ or the value of God's Word. One believes and lives in faith regardless of how things in the world may look. Jesus was having an exchange with the Scribes and Pharisees who wanted a sign from heaven to validate that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus answered, **“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”** (Matthew 12:39-40) Demanding signs is evidence of the lack of faith. Jesus closes by saying God the Father will validate Him as the Son of God when He is resurrected after dying and laying in the tomb for **“three days and three nights”** just as Jonah was brought back from **“the belly of the great fish”**. In our time be aware of those who use signs to show how special they are before God and want people revere them. Their ministries are based on miracles and unique events to validate themselves and usually involves money at some point.

Considering your own faith, if one is always looking for some proof before they carry out God's will, they are not walking **“by faith”** but by sight. Faith trusts God's Word even over one's own judgment. God's Word is true and our reasoning and logic is often fallen and sinful. Do not obey God because it makes sense, obey God because He is God and is always right.

Did it make sense for Noah to build a ship on dry land away from any body of water? Did it make sense for Abraham to leave his home and wander his whole life? Did it make sense for Moses to leave the riches of Egypt and become poor with God's people? Follow the Lord because He's worthy to be followed not because it always makes sense. Why did these all these patriarchs follow

God? Why did they do things that seemed a little strange? These men were not perfect, they all were sinners like us but they followed because they had the right view of God. They followed because of proper theology. It is important for us to have a correct view of God and not a view that we or someone else has invented. Fabricated gods are not worthy of our devotion.

Key Truth: Faith allows us to overcome the falseness of the world, persecution and suffering, and be strengthened through God’s Word and Spirit to expose the world to the glory of God.

Pray

Faith In The Present (vs. 30-35)

Please open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 11. The writer of Hebrews starts by referring to the Book of Joshua when he mentions two examples, Joshua and the walls and Rahab and the spies. Reading beginning at verse 30, “**By faith** the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.”³¹ **By faith** Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.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. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.” Joshua believed God “**by faith**” when God told him that He had given the city to Him and the Israelites. Joshua was obedient to do as God directed even though it did not seem to make sense. They followed what God said

and the city fell to the Israelites on the seventh day. Joshua acted “**by faith**” even though from a worldly view and a military view what God instructed made no sense.

Rahab believed all the talk about the God of the Israelites. She had heard about the plagues of Egypt and she heard about the Exodus. While the others in the city cowered in fear, Rahab acted “**by faith**” and aligned herself with the people of God. The Israelite spies were brought into her home and she hid them. Hear the words, amazing words, of a Canaanite harlot who came to know the One true God, as she speaks to these men, “**I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.**”¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, **for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.**” Rahab heard and believed, “**by faith**” in the Living God so she asked the men to make a pledge in the name of God, continuing in verse 12, “**Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign**”¹³ that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” (Joshua 2:9-13) Is this not amazing, she heard, she believed and she acted “**by faith**”. My beloved, you have heard and God calls you to not only believe but to live out your belief “**by faith**”. I pray it is so.

By what I read in verse 32, I believe the writer of Hebrews may have been a preacher. He does what preachers do when they notice they have gone over time

and they still have a lot to say; he shifts to an overview. Reading verse 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 -**” In these examples we see that faith overcomes political power, evil, doubt, physical danger, violence, deadly persecution, weakness, fear, hostility, and even death. Reading from Romans chapter 8, “**Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**”³⁵ **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?**³⁶ As it is written, *‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’* (Psalm 44:22)³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:34-39) So, the patriarchs and men of the Old Testament, though they were fallen men who sinned at times, had hearts seeking God and lived “**by faith**” in difficult times. We too live in difficult times, will we stand in faith as true believers and as a “**remnant church**” or will we give in to liberalism of the “**broad church**” that wants to please the world in a desire to be accepted and to fill their pews? In these turbulent times we might be tempted to water down the gospel. In light of liberalism, for example, we might be tempted to want to fit in rather than standing “**by faith**” in the truths of Scripture and we may be tempted to cave in so that people will like us. However, in light of these verses we are examining we must see that faith wins over in the end. Without faith it is impossible to please God. So, the difference is pleasing man or pleasing God. Faith does not compromise when faced with danger or obstacles. Faith stands firm.

In the scriptures people acted in explicit trust in God. David goes up against Goliath. Here is the exchange between the two from 1 Samuel 17, ⁴³ “the Philistine said to David, ‘Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?’ And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ The Philistine said to David, ‘Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.’ ⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, ‘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. ⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel**, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give you into our hand.” (1 Samuel 17:43-47) The odds and circumstances were of little concern to David because of his faith in God.

Remember the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who refused to worship the gods of Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar? The king commanded, “But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, **our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace**, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.’” (Daniel 3:15-17) The furnace should have consumed them but they step into the furnace “**by faith**” in God and God delivers them.

King Darius of the Medes and the Persians loved Daniel who served him well. Darius came to respect Daniel and his God. The other officials were jealous of Daniel and had the king sign into law that no one could worship any other god than the king. Daniel continued to pray and worship the One true God. The jealous officials brought Daniel before King Darius. Even the king could change a law. Reading from Daniel chapter 6, “Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, ‘**May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!**’” (Daniel 6:16) “**By faith**” both the king and Daniel believed God was able to save Daniel. Faith is courageous and brings one through present crisis and danger to glorify God.

What about when we have faith and still suffer. What about when we believe and the pain and suffering never seems leave? Will we live by the key truth put forth by the writer of Hebrews; **Faith allows us to overcome the falseness of the world, persecution and suffering, and be strengthened through God’s Word and Spirit to expose the world to the glory of God.**

Faith In The Future (vs. 35-38)

The focus of the writer now shifts. Before we read about those who escaped death and now in verses 35 to 38, we read about those who had as much faith as the others but they did not escape. Reading at verse 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.”** How are we to

understand this passage when we are told faith overcomes? In some cases, faith wins present victories and faith also wins future victories. Sometimes faith wins over suffering and sometimes it wins through suffering. Which happens is determined by God. In which way will your life bring the maximum glory to God? A believer must be prepared to live boldly for Christ and this can include suffering as Jesus suffered. Paul traveled from Antioch to Lystra where he was stoned for preaching the gospel. Reading from Acts chapter 14, ²⁰ “When the disciples gathered about him, *Paul* rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**” (Acts 14:20-22) Paul went “through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God” The way in which Paul strengthened the souls of the new believers was to live out his faith and to teach them that a part of being a Christian is enduring tribulation and suffering. This sort of living example and teaching strengthens us because it prepares us for the time when it happens. Faith will prepare us, so that, we are not caught off guard by suffering. My beloved, persecution is coming – in what form may not be clear – but in a society where anything goes – standing strong for the truth of the Bible and Jesus as Lord is growing less tolerated.

Jesus taught his disciples as recorded in the Gospel According to John, ³³ “**I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**” (John 16:33) My beloved, we may not have walked with Jesus while He was on earth, but we are

His disciples and like every generation since His ascension we should prepare and expect persecution.

In light of these truths, how should we face suffering and how can we encourage others when they suffer? We can encourage them by showing them these types of texts from scripture and explaining that God loved these people and they suffered. Because we suffer does not mean God does not love us or that we do not have faith, as some, like the prosperity movement teaches. We suffer because we live in a fallen world. We suffer because God will get the most glory through our suffering. We suffer in this sinful world, but do not forget, Christ has done battle with Satan and has been victorious.

The Apostle Peter taught the church and believers in Jerusalem, who were living under severe persecution, 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.

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.

¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And ‘*If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*’ (Proverbs 11:31)

¹⁹ **Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”** (1 Peter 4:12-19)

When we suffer because of righteousness we can rejoice. We can rejoice because we are sharing in the suffering of Christ. We can rejoice because whatever is going on we are reminded of the fact that someday there will be no more pain

and suffering. Suffering only lasts for a time and then we all will be brought to completion in Christ. Faith allows us to overcome the falseness of the world, persecution and suffering, and be strengthened through God's Word and Spirit to expose the world to the glory of God.

Faith In Completion (vs. 39-40)

Faith not only wins present and future victories but faith lives in expectation of our inheritance, our completion of gloried bodies living forever with God. Reading at verse 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.” The basic point being made here in these final words from Chapter 11 is that the Old Testament heroes are commended for their faith as they waited for the promise of the New Covenant to be fulfilled. None of them ever saw the New Covenant fulfilled during their lives. God gave glimpses of Christ and the New Covenant to some, but **all** lived in a time of expectation “**by faith**”. We, however, live in a time of fulfillment. Christ has come, died, resurrected and ascended. The New Covenant is here. The writer masterfully is showing the Hebrews who were being tempted to look back to Judaism that they are living in the time that all the Old Testament believers waited for. Why would you want to forsake the New Covenant and all its riches to go back and slaughter lambs? We, as believers, are tempted to return to the world that we can see and touch, but that would be like dog returning to its vomit. As it says in Proverbs, “Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.”

(Proverbs 26:11)

The “**something better for us**” of verse 40, is the better Covenant, the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. In other words, we have the final revelation from God

and they did not. So, if the saints of the Old Testament could live “**by faith**”, if the saints of the early church, who were being persecuted lived “**by faith**”, then we, my beloved, are to live “**by faith**”. One may be tempted to return to the false promises of the world, just as the early believers were tempted to return to Judaism, but “**by faith**” one lives for Christ alone.

The logic of chapter 11 of Hebrews is that the Old Testament believers walked “**by faith**” in the promise of a New Covenant which would work to overcome sin and glorify the believer “**by faith**” in the One true God. The Hebrew Christians during the time of the writing of Hebrews had the New Covenant and like us were waiting for the fullness of it. If Old Testament believers could live “**by faith**” in the light that they had, how much more should we live “**by faith**” seeing that we have more fulfilled promises than they.

Whether God calls you to have victory over suffering or victory through suffering the bottom line is the same. Walk “**by faith**”. Whether you’re rich or poor, walk “**by faith**”. Whether you’re young or old, walk “**by faith**”. Regardless what life God has you to live, live it to the fullest “**by faith**”. God is trustworthy. God will bring all believers to completion and sometimes suffering is a part of that process.

Key Truth to remember and place in your heart from this teaching is; **Faith allows us to overcome the falseness of the world, persecution and suffering, and be strengthened through God’s Word and Spirit to expose the world to the glory of God. Amen!**