

Hebrews 11:32-40

Living by Faith – After All is Said and Done

And what shall I more say? – v. 32

And what shall I more say? – the author of this epistle asks in v. 32. Arguably he has said much already. He has directed our attention to some of the prominent characters in the Old Testament who lived by faith and his aim has been to encourage the readers of this epistle to follow their example and live by faith.

Verse 32 makes it plain that the author of Hebrews has not exhausted his examples. Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephtah, David and Samuel and the prophets could also be added to the list without exhausting the list. There are unnamed women mentioned in v. 35 and there are unnamed others mentioned in v. 35 and again in v. 36.

By looking at these last 9 verses of Hebrews 11 we could analyze them by saying that they describe the exploits of faith in vv. 32-34; the endurance of faith in vv. 35-38 and the ultimate unity of faith found in vv. 39, 40. Under the first heading we have a number of exploits described – subduing kingdoms, manifesting righteousness, obtaining promises, stopping the mouths of lions etc. Many of these things we dream of accomplishing by our own faith. Oh that we might subdue our own country and win it back to Christ – that we might manifest righteousness, obtain promises when it comes to the salvation of our households and that we might stop the mouths of those spiritual lions that roar out their blasphemies against God.

The second heading moves us to fear and trembling and we hope that we can endure trials of cruel mockings and scourgings as well as bonds and imprisonment. We sigh toward heaven and carry in our sighs petitions in prayer in which we plead with God – *let us be found faithful when the times of testing come. Deliver us from clinging to anything in this world to such an extent that we wouldn't be willing to give it up for thee, O Lord.*

When we come to the last two verses of the chapter we find a statement that is rather amazing. In spite of all the exploits that our Fathers in the faith have done and in spite of all that Christians have endured throughout the ages, there is yet something about them that is missing. They are not yet complete and will not be complete until all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more.

There is certainly an implied exhortation in these last two verses to join the ranks of those that have done great exploits and endured so much. And the exhortation that is implied in the last two verses will become an actual exhortation when we enter into the next chapter. The first two verses of chapter 12 really show us where the entire argument of chp. 11 leads us. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*

What I would like to do this morning is to look at these last 9 verses in chp. 11 and see them as a summary statement that pertains to the subject of living by faith. We've been raising and answering the same question throughout these studies in chp. 11. The question has been *What does it mean to live by faith?*

When you reach the point when there is no more to be said, as is suggested in our text then it's time to summarize what has already been said. And so that's what I would like to do this morning as we consider once again the subject:

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What does it amount to? What are the key elements to it? What do we need to take with us now so that we may heed the exhortation of this portion of Hebrews? I would have you consider with me first of all that:

I. Living by Faith Amounts to Conformity to Christ

When we look at vv. 33-37 and contemplate the exploits and the endurance of faith, we're able to identify many of the things described with particular Old Testament saints. David subdued kingdoms; Solomon in his wisdom wrought righteousness; Daniel stopped the mouths of lions; Daniel's companions quenched the violence of fire etc.

We considered in prayer meeting a couple of weeks ago that the widow of Zarephath, in Elijah's day, received her son raised to life again. Jeremiah certainly underwent cruel mockings and bonds and imprisonment. And according to Jewish tradition, the prophet, Isaiah was sawn asunder by the servants of King Manasseh.

So we can see many of these deeds of faith manifested in Old Testament characters. There's another way to view these verses, however, and that is to see these exploits and trials of faith as being fulfilled in Christ.

I think, for example, of Christ's final triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The multitudes paved the way for him by laying their garments and branches from the trees in his path. They cried out *Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord.* The Pharisees were so distraught by this event that they said among themselves, *Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after him.*

Could it not be said on such an occasion that Christ subdued the nation of Israel to himself? Those that were ignorant of his priestly ministry that would yet be accomplished thought that the time was at hand to throw off the bondage of the Roman Empire and establish Jerusalem as the capital of the world. And had that been Christ's purpose he assuredly would have accomplished it.

Even during his trial before Pilate one could argue that he subdued that ruler. We don't find Christ pleading his case before Pilate. We don't find him begging Pilate for mercy. We find, instead, Pilate declaring him to be faultless. And when Pilate's wife sends him a message and urges him to have nothing to do with that righteous man we find Pilate

intensifying his efforts to release Christ. *Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above* – Christ says to Pilate in Jn. 19:11. And in the very next verse we read *And from then on Pilate sought to release him*. So even in his trial when it appeared that his enemies had at last got the best of him, the truth was that he had gotten the best of them and was in complete control as he advanced his purpose of redemption.

But if I could call your attention back to the words of our text in Heb. 11:33 – it could certainly be said of Christ that he *wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and stopped the mouths of lions*. He wrought righteousness in every deed he performed and in every truth he taught. He obtained the promise of salvation for those he came to represent. And don't we find him repeatedly stopping the mouths of lions by silencing his adversaries and forbidding demons to speak.

Perhaps most glorious as it pertains to Christ is the statement in v. 34 which tells us of those that *quenched the violence of fire*. Can we not find in such a statement a very clear allusion to Christ as our propitiation? I've said it on many occasions and it's fitting to say it in connection with this statement in v. 34 that in Old Testament times the flames consumed all those animal sacrifices but in the case of Christ it was the sacrifice that consumed the flames so that Paul could write to the Romans that there is now therefore no condemnation to those which are in Christ Jesus.

It can certainly be said of Christ that *women received their dead raised to life again*. And it can certainly be said of Christ that he was tortured and would not accept deliverance from his afflictions though he could have called upon legions of angels to deliver him. And it can certainly be said of Christ that he endured trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment.

These verses, then, that speak to us of the exploits and endurance of faith also serve to remind us of the One who accomplished the greatest exploits and endured the greatest trials of afflictions. And doesn't this indicate to us that when we're called upon to live by faith, we are called upon, simply, to be like Christ?

Perhaps the most practical statement in these verses that really touches home and gives us encouragement to press on in our faith is the statement in v. 34 that reads *out of weakness were made strong*. This term *weakness* when applied to the soul conveys the meaning of *want of strength and capacity requisite to understand a thing, or do things great and glorious, or restrain corrupt desires, or bear trials and troubles*.

I can't relate much to subduing kingdoms or stopping the mouths of lions but I can certainly relate to this term *weakness*. I feel too often such a lack of spiritual power and the strength of inbred sin. And yet I take hope in such a statement that these very things that I feel are the things through which Christ can make me strong. And he will make us strong. His purpose, after all, is to conform us to his image and he was strong.

And so we can fully expect that by believing in him we will be used of him to advance his cause. Even our feeble efforts will be blessed by him in such a way that we partake of

the blessing of advancing his kingdom. When all is said and done, therefore, living by faith means being conformed to his image. But would you consider with me next that:

II. Living By Faith Means a Heavenly Outlook

When you look at the exploits that were accomplished by those Old Testament saints and you note, by way of contrast, the things that many of the Old Testament saints endured in their trials, there is a common denominator between them both. Both were at war with the world. Neither were in love with the world unless that love was a manifest weakness as in the case of Samson. But even Samson, in the end, would slay more in his death than he did in his life – the point being, then, that those that live by faith see beyond this present evil world. And they see beyond it to the point where they are not aligned with it but are, instead, at war against it.

And shouldn't we be at war against the world? The world, after all, is in rebellion against God and against Christ. The rationale of the world tempts us to throw off all restraint and indulge ourselves totally to our ruin. The world in alliance with our flesh leads us to take things that in and of themselves may be completely legitimate but in unsanctified use become sources of idolatry and corruption.

The picture certainly comes across in vv. 37 & 38 that the saints of Christ are not at home in this world. *They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute afflicted, tormented* v. 37 tells us. *They were not worthy of the world* v. 38 tells us. *They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

And in this respect they also resemble Christ who was such a complete stranger to the world and had so little interest in the things of the world that he had no place even to lay his head. There were those, to be sure, that would have been quite happy to make Christ their king in a worldly sense. We read of them in John's gospel chp. 6. The incident occurs right after Christ has fed the five thousand. But their desires for such a kingship were within the bounds of this sin-cursed world and Christ was aiming for something much better and much purer. And before that chapter is over many that had gained an initial interest in Christ abandon him. They abandon him when he speaks of his body and blood. They abandon him when it becomes apparent that his kingdom will not resemble the current world.

We have seen this as a recurring theme in this 11th chapter of Hebrews. Noah, by his faith condemned the world. Abraham looked beyond this world for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt and thus forsook Egypt. We saw in our last study that Rahab the harlot was able to say *amen* to God's judgment against the world.

And now we read these general statements at the end of Heb. 11 that tell us that those that endure the world's afflictions on account of their faith in Christ are not worthy of the world. And so we're led to the inevitable conclusion that there's no compatibility between

faith and worldliness. Faith sees beyond this world; a spirit of worldliness clings to the things of this world.

And if you would live by faith, therefore, you must not love this world neither the things that are in this world, If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1Jn. 2:15-17).

Certainly in our day and in our culture the greatest trial that most Christians face is the trial of worldliness. This may be less so now, perhaps, than in previous years because of the dreadful state of the economy but still, by and large, the modern day Christian in America is way too attached to the things of this world and way too governed by a spirit of worldliness.

I know that I have to be careful when I aim both barrels, as it were, at worldliness because it is possible to go to extremes. I'm afraid that some ministries create the impression that if you're engaged in any other activities other than reading your Bible, or praying, or witnessing then you must be engaged in worldliness. We don't want to adopt the monastic mentality that tells we have to build walls around ourselves in such a way that we shut ourselves in and everything else out.

That's not what I'm talking about. Thomas Watson perhaps said it best when he said *All the danger is when the world gets into the heart. The water is useful for the sailing of the ship; all the danger is when the water gets into the ship; so the fear is when the world gets into the heart.*

Isn't that the challenge we face? – keeping the world out of our hearts? And trying to keep the world out of the hearts of our children? Here is where parental example will play a prominent role in the lives of our children. And how many parents there are, I'm afraid, that lament what they perceive to be the worldliness in the hearts of their children and the worldliness in the hearts of Christian children in general and yet the cause of such a worldly spirit is not so hard to trace. They're taking after their parents.

And could I just add here that when it comes to this matter of worldliness you will not succeed in gaining victory over it in your own hearts or in the hearts of your children by simply placing restrictions on their conduct. I'm afraid that all too often the placing of many restrictions only increases the pressure within a young person's heart to go the way of the world.

It is at this point, especially, that a Christian must replace love for the world with love for Christ and love for the things of Christ. Isn't it ironic how often we find ourselves too tired for spiritual things? I'm too tired to read my Bible. I'm too exhausted for time in prayer. How often do we complain that we're too tired for worldly entertainment?

Oh that God would so alter our affections that, like Moses, we may feel compelled to forsake Egypt. May we be so conscious of Christ's love and the provision Christ has made

for our everlasting happiness and well-being that we'll esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt and that, like Paul, we'll count all things but loss that we may gain a greater and more intimate knowledge of Christ.

So long as Christ is first and foremost in our hearts and our aim is to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness then I believe we'll learn how to use the things of the world without abusing them. What does it mean to live by faith, then, when all is said and done? It means conformity to Christ and conformity to Christ means a heavenly outlook.

Would you consider with me finally that when all is said and done:

III. Living By Faith Encompasses a Glorious Unity

Look again at the last two verses of the chapter – vv. 39,40 *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

As great as these Old Testament saints were – as great as the exploits they accomplished were and as impressive as their endurance proved to be they are still lacking something. And the thing they're lacking is the rest of the redeemed of Christ joining them.

You may recall from his high priestly prayer in Jn. 17 that Christ prayed for the unity of his followers. So we read in Jn. 17:21 *That they all may be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

I know that this petition of Christ has been sorely abused by the ecumenical movement in such a way that they would do away with the cardinal doctrines of the faith for the sake of unity. In their quest for unity they're willing to destroy the foundation upon which that unity must be based.

On the other hand – it's not hard to imagine that some Christians would find the thought quite disturbing of who they're going to have to spend eternity with. There's going to be, you see, evangelicals in heaven whose ministries aren't the same as mine, who perhaps do things that I wouldn't do and who perhaps would be critical of me for things that I have either done or failed to do in their estimation.

There's coming a day when all the saints of Christ from every generation will be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God forever. And until that day comes there will always be a sense of incompleteness in this present world.

There are high times, to be sure – and we long for those times of refreshment and renewal that come during times of revival blessing. But even those times are lacking or are incomplete in comparison to a glorious day that is yet to come when all the saints of God will surround Christ's throne and every tear is wiped away and the time of conquest and endurance are no more.

Isn't it good to know that the times of cruel mockings and scourgings and bonds and imprisonments will come to an end when redemption is consummated? Isn't it thrilling to think that the ultimate conquest of kingdoms will take place on that occasion and even the enemies of Christ will be compelled to bow before him and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?

Living by faith, then, means to be a forward looking person. Looking back only reveals a heart that is still in love with the world and looking back, spiritually speaking, has the effect of turning us into pillars of salt. There are some things to which we may look back upon. We may look back and draw encouragement from the heroes of the faith in previous generations. We may admire their exploits and their endurance and we should seek God for the same grace that enabled them to do great things.

And of course we're called upon to look back in remembrance of who Christ is and what Christ has accomplished. We never want to forget his broken body and shed blood. We remember with grateful hearts that he above all others subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire and made strong those who were weak.

But we look back in order to equip ourselves to move forward. This is what Paul is doing in this epistle. He wanted the Jews to look back and he wants you and I to look back to see what it meant to a great cloud of witnesses to live by faith. But he wants us to look back so that we be enabled to look ahead and to see beyond time and beyond this world to the time when the saints of God will be complete.

May God help us, then, like our fathers, to obtain a good report through faith. May we indeed be strong to do exploits for Christ and may we be so close to Christ that we'll be able and willing and desirous to bear all things for Christ knowing as we know that a day is coming in which all things will be complete in Christ.