

Faith Does Great Things

Hebrews 11:32-40

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Introduction:

We have been in Hebrews 11 for a while, working through some of the most excellent examples of those who had faith. Last week, it was the example of Rahab in verse 31.

- With verse 32, the writer wants to wrap things up.
 - He has given us lots of specific examples, and now he has reached a point where he says, “What more could I say?”
 - He expresses that it would go beyond his purpose to cover all the examples—even the important examples—that he might draw from the Old Testament.

I will go right to our Scripture reading today.

- I will read to the end of the chapter.
- I will give you an overview of it, then focus on verses 32-35a.

Here is our reading—from Hebrews 11:32-40.

- Listen with reverence. This is the word of God.
- You might notice as well that this passage is really quite beautiful—in the way it lays everything out in such a splendid, descriptive, almost poetical way, talking about our dear ancestors in the faith.

Heb 11:32-40: And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶

Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They 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— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth.* ³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His word.

- May He help us to apply it to our lives.

I. The writer wraps things up in a way that will prepare the way for the specific applications he wants to make to the Hebrews in chapters 12 & 13.

A. Overall, he is summarising the power or efficacy of faith for their encouragement.

1. They were going through difficult times, and in chapters 12 & 13, he is going to stress how they need to keep on keeping on for the LORD by faith.
 - Their people had, for the most part, rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Their people were quite opposed to any one of their own who professed Him.
 - Families had been divided and there was persecution—mocking and even worse. Just consider the things that Paul suffered for preaching the gospel.
 - They were being pressured to deny Christ—or at least to draw back.

2. So he is saying to them, “Look at what faith can do!”
 - a. That’s why he has been giving them (and us) all these examples.
 - Faith is very powerful.
 - Just little faith can move mountains.
 - b. Of course, it is not really faith that does this—not on its own...
 - The world sometimes looks at how faith can help us keep going, if we believe that we will do well—
 - I will fully agree that it definitely does help to motivate us, that it helps you to do more and to do it better.
 - That is a way that faith helps us as believers too.
 - c. But the faith that is commended here is faith in the LORD.
 - It is not faith itself, but the God in whom we trust who is powerful!
 - He calls us to trust in Him to save us from our sin and to keep us—to deliver us from our enemies, to advance His kingdom...
 - Faith in Hebrews 11 is faith in God and in His Son Jesus Christ.
 - The author has gone to great lengths to show us in this epistle what Jesus did to save us, and he is telling us that if we trust in Him—have faith in Him—He *will* save us.
 - The power of faith is that by it, God lets us draw upon His power.
 - Faith is mighty only because it lays hold of the Almighty.
- The verses we read are about the power and efficacy of faith...
- B. Notice how there is a progression from what faith enables us to do to what it enables us to endure.
1. It is very apparent on the face of it.
 - a. Verses 33-35a speak of the wonders that God does for us through faith.
 - **³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again.**
 - b. Verses 35b – 38 speak of the endurance that God gives to those who have faith.
 - **^{35-b} Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They 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— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth.***
 2. This is a strong contrast.
 - Sometimes, the LORD enables His people to conquer their enemies, at other times He enables us to endure the terrible things that they throw at us.
 - It all depends on His purposes at the time—in how He wants to use us and work in our lives—how He wants to make Himself known.

- By enabling us to triumph He shows that He is LORD of all; by enabling us to endure suffering He shows our unyielding love and devotion to Him.
 - He uses both to reach the lost, and both to harden the reprobate.
 - Many are saved when they see believers patiently bearing the cross.
 - By triumph, He encourages us of our coming crown, by suffering, He deepens our devotion and our sense of His transforming grace in us.
 - Both have their use, and we do well to learn from one as well as the other.
 - Both draw us to Him and both strengthen us and both enlarge our hope.
3. Here is what a couple of my favourite authors have said about this contrast.
- John Brown says of this passage: “Generally, it is an illustration of the power of faith; but the power of faith is viewed in two aspects—its power to enable men to do what otherwise they could not have done, and, its power to enable men to suffer what otherwise they could not have suffered.”
 - John Owen says: “Faith will do and effect great things of all sorts, when we are called unto them; it will also enable us to suffer the greatest, hardest, and most terrible things, which our nature can be exposed unto.”
- Owen adds: “He closes with instances of the latter sort because that was what the Hebrews had to endure.”
- The brings us to another important point...
- C. The writer moves from what faith enables us to do to what it enables us to endure to prepare the way for chapter 12 where he will speak about enduring hard things by faith.
- As I already mentioned, that is what the Hebrews were especially dealing with.
1. Like us, they needed to be reminded that faith can enable us to do wonders.
- We need to be reminded that nothing is too hard for the Lord.
 - Most of the time, He is not performing wonders like the ones that are described in verses 32-35a.
 - It was only a few of His people that He raised up to open the Red Sea or to close the mouth of lions, or to subdue kingdoms for His name.
 - Those testify to us of His power, but we are wrong if we expect that we will all be doing such things.
- Again, like us, the Hebrews needed to remember that by faith, we can move mountains if God calls us to do so.
2. But even more, they needed to be reminded that faith can enable us to endure when we are being trampled by the world.
- When we must be tortured and burned and killed without deliverance in this world.
 - When we must be mocked and put in prison until we rot.
 - When we must be driven to wander in deserts, to hide in dens and caves.
 - That was more the situation that the Hebrews faced.
 - Yes, they were seeing the kingdom slowly advance, but they were seeing the heavy hand of persecution upon them even more.

- That is what the author is going to talk about in chapters 12 and 13.
3. It all depends on whatever our wise and gracious God calls us to do.
 - He calls us to do great things, but not ordinarily great wonders—
 - He calls us to bear the cross in this world like His Son did and like His people so often did in the Old Testament too, but not to usually to extreme degrees.
 - Think of the people who spent most of their lives under Egyptian bondage, or the prophets of the Lord who hid in caves when Ahab was king.

TRANS> So I hope that gives you a good overview of this passage.

- For the rest our time today, I want to look at the first part—what faith enables us to do.
- Then, next week, Lord willing, we will look at what faith enables us to bear.

II. Let's begin by looking at how faith enabled men of old to triumph over their enemies.

- And remember, we look at this to encourage us in the power and efficacy of faith—in what a man can do when he trusts in the Lord.

A. First, there are names of those who did exploits.

1. Gideon is famous for conquering the Midianites who oppressed Israel for seven years, destroying their crops when they came through in great numbers with their animals.
 - God called Gideon to go against them under impossible odds, with an army of only 300 men. By faith, Gideon triumphed.
2. Barak was the timid commander who received a prophecy through the prophetess Deborah to go against King Jabin, who had 900 iron chariots, and deliver Israel.
 - By faith, God enabled Barak to be victorious.
3. Samson was the man that God made strong until because of his disobedience God took away his strength, leading to his imprisonment under the hand of the Philistines who also put out his eyes.
 - By faith, Samson, when he was brought into the temple of Dagon at a great festival to be mocked, placed his hands upon the main supports of the temple and cried out to God for his mighty strength which enabled him to push the central pillars down and cause the whole place to collapse, thus freeing Israel from the Philistines' dominion for a time.
4. Jephthah was another one of the judges who, by faith, freed Israel from oppression by another enemy nation (which they kept falling under because of their sin), this time, the people of Ammon.
 - He called on God and made a foolish vow when the people asked him to deliver them, and the Lord gave him the victory, despite his foolish vow.
5. David is mentioned next, a man who had so many victories by faith that we would need to do a whole series—but the story of Goliath is sufficient to illustrate.
 - By faith, David, a young shepherd boy, conquered this great warrior with only his slingshot.
6. Samuel is mentioned next.
 - Samuel was a remarkable leader at a time when Israel was very discouraged because of their sin—Samuel was used to lead many to repentance.

7. The prophets in general are mentioned—so many stories could be told.
- B. Besides those who did the exploits, a list of exploits is given...
1. That by faith they subdued kingdoms—think of how Isaiah prophesied of the fall of Assyria when they tried to take Jerusalem. In one night, an angel struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand soldiers.
 2. That by faith they worked righteousness—Jonah called the whole city of Nineveh to repentance. By faith, Haggai got the people to return to work building the temple.
 3. By faith they obtained promises—Elijah prophesied of a famine, then promised that it would end, and it did.
 4. By faith, they stopped the mouths of lions—who else but faithful Daniel who was cast into a lion’s den for violating a malicious edict that none could be prayed to but the king.
 5. By faith, his friends in exile quenched the violence of fire—not the fire, but its violence, so that being cast into a fiery furnace did not hurt them.
 6. By faith, they escaped the edge of the sword—we might think of Elisha whom they tried to arrest but could not because he called fire down from heaven upon the captains and their fifty men who tried to take him.
 7. By faith they were made strong in weakness—we think of David, who, being pursued by Saul, at one point was ready to give up, but then strengthened himself in the Lord.
 8. By faith, they became valiant in battle—think of Saul’s son Jonathan who, with his armour bearer, turned the battle with the Philistines around.
 9. By faith, women received their dead back to life—Elijah raised up the widow’s son at Zarephath and Elisha restored the life of the Shunamite’s son.

III. What does all this mean for us?

- A. Are we lacking faith because we are not doing wonders like these?
- Does the Lord show us these to rebuke us for our lack of faith?
1. Surely, a lack of faith on the part of our nation does indeed bring us down and make us weak.
 - Many times, the people began to cry out to the Lord for deliverance when He chastened them, and God heard and delivered them, raising up these heroes who acted by faith.
 2. But many of the most faithful prophets and kings did not see triumph.
 - Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophesied of future deliverance, but in their own day, only of exile and enslavement for God’s people.
 - We have to wait on the Lord’s time. He delivers us when He is pleased.
 3. Not only that, but these heroes we read about were men that were especially called and raised up by God to serve Him in these ways.
 - We are not given these examples to say that all of us should be doing what they were called to do, but to remind us that by faith, we can do the LORD has called us to do!

- If they could do these great wonders to which God called them by faith, can we not do the ordinary things that He has called us to do by faith?

B. What has He given us to do by faith—this faith in the Mighty One who can move mountains?

1. He has called us to be saved—by faith—from sin, hell, bondage to Satan, and death.
 - We can do this only by faith.
2. He has called us to refrain from worldly lusts that war against the soul. This can only be done by faith. Stop making excuses and indulging yourself. God has spoken.
3. He calls us to be anxious for nothing and to stop worrying. Faith laid hold of the Lord to make the Sun stand still. By faith worry can end.
4. We are called to trust in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding. Can we do that when we have something hard to do for the Lord? Something that stretches us? By faith, we can.
5. He calls us to train up our children in the Lord. Can we teach them to live in fellowship with the Lord? Has God made promise about them? By faith, we can.
6. And somewhat related, I am called to rebuke my brother when he sins. By faith, I can do that and will do that.
7. I am commanded to do my work heartily as if I were doing it for the Lord. Only by faith is that possible—only by looking to Him.
8. I am called to be content with whatever I have. There is not place for envy and complaining when I am poor or infirm or feeling my age. By faith, I can be thankful.
9. I am indeed called to give thanks in all things. By faith, it can be so.
10. I am to be angry and sin not. Can I control appropriate anger so that it is used for God's glory? Only by faith.
11. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. By faith, I can. By faith, I must.
12. I am called to submit to those who have authority over me. By faith, I can do that without fear, and I can do it cheerfully.
13. I am to forgive others and not to be bitter against them. By faith, you can replace bitterness with delight in God.
14. I am called to be a faithful example and witness for Jesus Christ—to do my part in leading others to faith. By faith, I can be a savour of life unto life to some and a savour of death unto death to others.
15. Related to that, I am to let the beauty of the Lord be seen upon me. Only by faith.
16. By faith, I am to confess Christ instead of being ashamed of Him.
17. By faith, I can fear God instead of fearing man.
18. By faith, I can glorify God in eating and drinking—actually do that and all that I do for Him—in ways that please Him. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him.
19. God calls me to sit at the gates of wisdom each day. By faith, I can gather my family to do that and by faith, I can hear His voice (His word can come to me with the power of the Holy Spirit.)
20. I am called to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy—only by faith, by leaning on Him, can I do that.

21. I am called to bring my tithes to God and give alms to the poor. By faith I can.
22. God calls me to repent of my sin that I might always live in fellowship with Him. By faith, it can be done.
23. He calls me to pray without ceasing. By faith, I will.
24. He calls me to love my neighbour as myself and to love my enemies. By faith.
25. I am to boast in the Lord, and not in myself—only faith can see Him.
26. I am called to not be weary in well doing. By faith, I can obey.

IV. But what does faith have to do with all of these things? How does it help?

- A. Faith recognises the authority of God and of His word.
 - It believes simply that God is God.
 - That He has all authority in heaven and earth. That He is the judge of all. That compared to Him, men are nothing. Faith sees that He alone has a right to your unquestioning obedience.
 - Faith believes that He sees us, that He is holy and will not tolerate sin.
 - And so when God speaks things such as those 26 we just looked at, faith recognises that all this is from God—it is not optional.
- B. Faith believes that the Lord will help us and it actively pleads with Him for help.
 1. It believes in the Holy Spirit who changes stubborn hearts into obedient hearts and so it looks to Him for help.
 2. It believes that Christ is alive and reigning and interceding for us, and that our prayers will always reach Him, and if for things according to His command and will, will obtain His help.
 - Is it not even a promise of the covenant that He has put His Spirit in us to give us a new heart of obedience?
 3. Indeed, faith believes that God is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him—so of course, believing that, it seeks Him!
- C. Faith believes that in Christ, we are fully forgiven and fully justified in God's sight.
 - This enables us to live in sweet communion with the Lord.
 1. Faith knows that Christ came and died on the cross, taking our punishment in order that we might walk with God—we are cleansed from our sin.
 2. Like Enoch, we are able to walk with God every day—and do these things that we are called to do every day!
 3. Knowing and believing that we are forgiven enable us to know that the Lord is pleased with us—indeed, highly pleased with the fruit that we bear for Him!
 4. Faith, believing that we are forgiven, is able to enjoy the LORD and know that He is pleased—indeed, highly pleased with the fruit we bear for Him.
 - He not only loves us with that unconditional love of His that took us in, but now He loves what we are becoming as we walk with Him.
 - That puts a song in your heart and spring in your step!

Let us pray in faith that by faith we will be able to serve God acceptably.

- If by faith that is as small as a mustard seed, we can move mountains when God calls us to, surely we can also, by faith, live for Him each day?

- Let's do it.