



The Cost of God-Pleasing Faith

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Hebrews 11:30-40

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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. 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.

(Pastor prays)

All of our heroes suffer. It's one of the trademarks of Christianity. Certainly, we sometimes idolize celebrities and celebrate athletes and lionize TikTok stats, but when it comes to our heroes, people we look to for inspiration and strength, we look to those who suffered with strength and dignity and grace. Even the author in Hebrews 12:2 says, ² *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the*

cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

He suffered for our joy. Our heroes suffer. Last week we stood in Oxford England at the Martyrs Monument where Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were burned at the stake for the faith “once and for all delivered to the saints.” We stood there inspired and strengthened and thinking, yes, I want to be that strong. I want to be faithful to Christ in a hostile, hateful world. And the preacher here in Hebrews 11 knows that, so he lines up believer after believer in front of his people and in front of us to strengthen our faith and to feed our souls and to prepare our hearts to do hard things in the name of Jesus. And, to do them with a deep and profound gospel joy.

I have one aim today and that is to stiffen your spiritual spine for the task at hand so that you might be faithful to the God who loves you and purchased you at the cross of His son Jesus. I want your faith, the size of a mustard seed, to grow into a tree trunk of sturdiness that you might abide in Christ as Christ abides in you, that you might know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death. That you and I might have a genuine God-honoring faith in the crucified, resurrected Jesus and rejoice in this life knowing God is *for* you and if God is *for* you, who can be *against* you. That’s the life of faith, to not hate the suffering because...

Suffering is the Cost of God-Honoring Faith

This is not for the faint of heart. This is not the “prosperity gospel.” This is not easy-chair Christianity. This is *graveside* faith. This is through-tears faith, lonely faith. This is God-honoring faith. Let’s ease into it by degrees as the preacher does. Let’s see what faith does.

Faith shows us the power and mercy of God

There are two items to see in one scene.

The first is the power of God in verse 30. You know that story from Joshua 6.
³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. God breaks through the natural order and brings a great victory against all odds. Knocking down the walls of a fortress and giving a victory to the people of God that they couldn't have unless He did it. This is like surviving a car wreck or having a child that has drowned in a pool to be brought back to life. This is saving a lost adult. These are the miracles that show up now and then to remind us of God's power. I am reading the biography of A.W. Pink, a preacher and writer in the early 20th Century. He couldn't keep a church because he told everybody what he thought at the time. He was an insightful commentator. He said these are several lessons this passage teaches us.

God's ways are not our ways

Marching around walls as a battle plan, whoever heard of fortress walls just falling down? God has the power to do that. This encourages our continued praying when it doesn't seem to work.

God is superior to the laws of nature

And can break in anytime He wants. Ask in prayer, ask God to do more than you are asking now.

Insurmountable problems pop up from time to time in the life of faith

Difficulties that are beyond you, surrender that to God and trust Him.

This is a reminder that Satan's strongholds cannot stand before God

One of the greatest evidences of that is your own salvation. Even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, Christ died for us. That's the power of God.

Faith shows us the mercy of God. Rahab was a pagan prostitute whose life did not honor God at all and yet she was saved by God. This is the mercy of God.

This is the divine grace of God. And this is the Providence of God who sent the spies to her house. This is here to show us the powerful mercy of God to save the most stained sinner. This is here to throw us onto the goodness of God found ultimately at the cross of Jesus. This is here to press us toward a God-honoring faith. Is your faith honoring to God? Faith shows us the power and mercy of God.

Faith shows us that God can use anyone

Let's read verse 32 and there you find six names that I honestly would not have picked out. I'll go quickly because the preacher seems to be speeding up. *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—*

Let's do a quick bio on each of these six people listed and then maybe make some observations and see a few lessons.

Gideon. In Judges 6, Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress, hiding from the Midianites when God calls him. He asked for signs and questioned God, showing a lack of faith or courage. He later ended up making an ephod that would contribute to Israel's idolatry and yet God used him.

Barak. In Judges 5, Barak didn't have courage enough to go into battle if Deborah didn't go with him. Deborah and Jael actually won the battle, yet he is still mentioned here.

Samson. Samson is flippant at best; he makes neurotic vows and disrespects his parents. He used his great strength for his own gain and was very impulsive, promiscuous, and basically a meathead, yet God used him.

Jephthah. Jephthah is a renegade, illegitimate pretender to leadership and foolishly vowed to sacrifice his own daughter and did it, breaking God's law. He is mentioned.

Samuel. Samuel is the best of the bunch in this pivotal picture, but his children turned out terrible. God used him.

David. David is a man after God's own heart, but he got lazy in battle and committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah. And yet here he is, and we use the psalms he wrote to worship and see Jesus as the fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom. I think there are several lessons to learn from this group collectively.

The Bible always shows us the clay feet of our heroes so that our faith may be in the power of God and not people. You might have sinned and done so terribly and yet, in faith, God will use you in spite of it. God delights in choosing those who seem the most rebellious and using those who seem most unsuitable. God doesn't remember their sins; He remembers their trust. Sins are dealt with at the cross and there mercy washes and grace changes and God uses.

Faith shows us the power and mercy of God. Faith shows us that God can save and use anybody.

Faith empowers us for the battle, and every day is a battle

In verses 33 – 35a there are nine short phrases, grouped in three groups of three. Kent Hughes helped me with this one. 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 shows the broad empowerment of faith. Faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice and obtained promises. The preacher uses a general way of saying the good things that are going to happen in your life are going to come through your faith in Christ and His goodness. Here, the preacher is just giving a general principle throughout the whole testimony of the Bible. Through faith in Christ is salvation, sanctification and strength.

Faith gives us a personal empowerment for the struggle

The preacher uses a few familiar examples: stop the mouths of lions, David protecting the sheep, Daniel in the lions' den. The example of quenching the power of fire is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3.

Nebuchadnezzar tried to force them to bow down to the golden idol and if they didn't, he would throw them into the fiery furnace. They said, "throw us in and God will deliver. But if not, we still won't bow down." God honored that faith and delivered them. The example of escaping the edge of the sword is Elijah running from Jezebel and God caring for him and He will for you.

Faith empowers us to live with our weaknesses

Verse 34 says we are made strong out of our weakness. God gives us those weaknesses and limps and pains and shortcomings to remind us of the surpassing power of His greatness. And the preacher runs all the way up to the power of God to raise the dead. All of these are great displays of faith and victory. From verse 32 to verse 35a is sort of muscular victorious Christianity and then there's a turn to help us with the hardships of what we are facing now and the bewilderment of why life hurts so bad and what God is doing with our faith at this very moment.

Faith gives us power to endure

Let's just go through this passage just reading it and be reminded of how a suffering faith is a God-honoring faith used by God.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.* Persecution. The faithful endured torture, mocking, flogging, chains and prison. Enduring it by faith is a heroic cost.

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—* Death. In Oxford there was another man with Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley by the name of Thomas Cranmer. He was the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time. He watched his two friends die, burned at the stake

by Queen Mary, who's Bloody Mary. And when he watched them die, it rattled him as it would any of us. He decided to sign the confession to spare his own life, but after signing it he had a guilty conscience, and he recanted his recantation. He was trying to unsign it and they finally burned him at the stake too. And as he was burning, he took that hand that signed that confession and drove it into the fire! Why? Because he wanted to be remembered as somebody who died in the faith.

So you have persecution, death and then poverty. Let's go down to verse 37-38. This is where many of us are going to end up. This is the kind of Christianity we are going to have to have. 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.* What is God doing with that faith? What are we learning?

A.W. Pink has some ideas about this. Here is the first one. The Lord God omnipotent reigns. He is on the throne of the universe and He does according to His will. Everything that enters our lives is ordered by God who is our Father. Our enemies can do nothing against us without His direct permission. Remember Job and Peter. Romans 8:28 says no matter what Satan does, God will turn it for good. Faith looks through the present conflict and views the promise, anticipating the reward.

That's what verses 39 and 40 are about. All of this is headed somewhere, a promise. All of the Old Testament heroes looked forward to a coming promise. They didn't live to see it accomplished. It was that which their faith specifically embraced. That at the very center of time and history stands the cross of Jesus that unites us with every person who has God as their father, Christ as their savior and the Holy Spirit as their strength and comfort. It's a faith worth living for. It's a faith worth dying for. A God-pleasing faith is found only in Christ.

Do you have a God-honoring faith? Is Christ Lord and greatest treasure? Have you trusted in Christ and His cross alone to save you? Do you need help and strength? When we sing, come and pray.

(Pastor prays)