

Hebrews

Faith's Reward

Hebrews 11:32-40

INTRODUCTION:

Hebrews 11:32-40 (NASB95)

BODY:

I. The Blessing of God's Power to Accomplish Spectacular Results.

A. Faith Enables Flawed People to Accomplish Great Things for God.

Judges 8:24-27 (NASB95)

Judges 17:5 (NASB95)

Judges 4:16-21 (NASB95)

Judges 5:4 (NASB95)

Judges 5:20 (NASB95)

1 Samuel 8:1-3 (NASB95)

B. Faith Enables Us to Accomplish Things that Could Only Happen by God's Power.

Hebrews 11:33-35a (NASB95)

John 15:5 (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 4:7 (NASB95)

II. The Blessing of Grace to Endure Horrible Trials.

Hebrews 11:35-38 (NASB95)

Hebrews 11:39 (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NASB95)

III. The Ultimate Blessing of Eternal Rewards.

Hebrews 11:39-40 (NASB95)

Hebrews 10:10 (NASB95)

CONCLUSION:

1. Faith is Ready to Sacrifice Present Comfort for a Future Reward with Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NASB95)

2. Faith Lives with a Godly Focus instead of a focus on people or things.

3. Faith Trusts and Obeys God, Leaving the Results to His Sovereignty.

4. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ Counts More than Even Life Itself.

Matthew 25:21b (NASB95)

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INTRODUCTION:

The author of Hebrews sounds like a preacher with his eye on the clock. He could say far more, if time allowed. But instead, he simply lists a few names without comment and then describes the experiences of others, without naming them. Some won great victories by faith. Others suffered horrible torture and death by faith. While all of them gained approval by their faith, they did not receive the promise that **we** have received. The author is trying to exhort his readers to be faithful to Christ in the face of looming persecution. His message is much needed because of the human tendency to use faith in Christ as the means to personal comfort and happiness. But when trials come, faith is abandoned.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 11:32-40 (NASB95)

³² And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; ³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ³⁸ (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

Prayer

The text falls into three sections. In verses 32 through the first part of 35, he shows how sometimes God blesses those who trust Him with spectacular results. But without even catching his breath, in the middle of verse 35 through verse 38 he shifts direction to show that sometimes God blesses those who trust Him with the grace to endure horrible persecution without wavering. He concludes in verses 39-40 by showing that God will bless all who trust Him with eternal rewards.

BODY:

I. The Blessing of God's Power to Accomplish Spectacular Results.

Hebrews 11:32 (NASB95)

³² And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

Time does not permit me to go into detail on every person listed here, so I will summarize this section under two points:

A. Faith Enables Flawed People to Accomplish Great Things for God.

The author lists four men from the period of the Judges, followed by David, Samuel, and the prophets. He does not list them in chronological order, in that Gideon followed Barak, Samson followed Jephthah, and David followed Samuel. I do not know why he chose this particular order; he may have just named them spontaneously. But the interesting thing is that the first five men all had some serious shortcomings. But despite those flaws, God honored their faith.

Gideon was cowardly at first and had to be coaxed to do what God called him to do. Let's read the passage...

Judges 8:24-27 (NASB95)

²⁴ Yet Gideon said to them, "I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) ²⁵ They said, "We will surely give *them*." So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. ²⁶ The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 *shekels* of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which *were* on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that *were* on their camels' necks. ²⁷ Gideon made it into an **ephod**, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

So, you ask, "What is an ephod?". In the Old Testament, the ephod has two meanings. In one group of passages, it signifies a garment but in the second group is probably referring to an idol. As a garment, the ephod is referred to in the priestly ordinances as a part of the official dress of the high priest. It was to be made of threads "of blue and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen" and embroidered in gold thread "with cunning work".

The word *ephod* has an entirely different meaning in the second group of passages. It is certain that the word cannot here refer to a garment. This is evident in verses 26 –27 where it is recorded that Gideon took from the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite allies, golden earrings, weighing 1,700 shekels of gold, and made an "ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah," where it was worshiped by all Israel. A standard shekel weighed 11.5 grams. 1700 shekels would weigh 19,550 grams or a little over 43 pounds of gold.

There is another reference to an ephod.

Judges 17:5 (NASB95)

⁵ And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest.

The most natural inference from all these passages is that “**ephod**” here signifies an image that was set up in the sanctuary, especially since the word is cited with "household idols". The logical conclusion is that "**ephod**", in these cases, refers to a portable idol. Some scholars have suggested that the connection between the idol and the garment is that the idol was originally clothed in a linen garment, and the term "ephod" gradually came to describe the idol as a whole.

What we are to learn from this is that after Gideon's amazing victory with 300 men over the Midianite army of 135,000, he made an ephod that lured Israel into idolatry. Yet in spite of his failures, the author names him as a hero of faith.

The account of **Deborah and Barak** is found in Judges 4 and 5. The Israelites had sinned against God and had been placed under the control of the Canaanite king Jabin and the commander of his army, Sisera. The Canaanites had 900 chariots of iron and ruled over Israel for 20 years. Deborah and Barak then gathered 10,000 troops and attacked Sisera and his army and Barak's troops won.

Judges 4:16-21 (NASB95)

¹⁶ But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.

¹⁷ Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for *there was peace* between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. ¹⁸ Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.” And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. ¹⁹ He said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. ²⁰ He said to her, “Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there anyone here?’ that you shall say, ‘No.’” ²¹ But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died.

The song of Deborah and Barak in chapter 5 gives some more detail about God's hand in the victory over the Canaanites:

Judges 5:4 (NASB95)

⁴ “Lord, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, Even the clouds dripped water.

Evidently, God used a flood to disable the iron chariots of Sisera. The victory was supernatural.

Judges 5:20 (NASB95)

²⁰ “The stars fought from heaven, From their courses they fought against Sisera.

Samson routed the Philistines on numerous occasions, yet he was tripped up by his lust for foreign women.

Jephthah, the son of a harlot, was at first driven away by his half-brothers. But later, the elders of his home town pled with him to return and lead them in battle against the enemy. He won a victory, but then made a rash vow to sacrifice the first thing that came

out of his house when he returned from battle. His only daughter came out to greet him, and he foolishly kept his stupid vow.

David was a man after God's heart, who had great faith even as a teenager, when he defeated Goliath. But he later committed adultery and then murder to cover his tracks.

Even **Samuel**, although a godly man himself, failed to raise his sons to follow the Lord.

1 Samuel 8:1-3 (NASB95)

8 And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. ² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; *they were judging in Beersheba.* ³ His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.

Samuel was regarded as the first of the prophets, and so the term covers everyone from his day down to Malachi. As a whole, they boldly spoke God's truth, and often suffered for it. When you look at the men of verse 32 it describes men who had glaring flaws. But in spite of these flaws, God used them because they trusted Him in some challenging situations.

We would apply this improperly if we shrugged off our sins and shortcomings as no big deal. We should be confronting our sins, growing in holiness and maturity. But this list should encourage us with the fact that God **uses IMPERFECT** people who trust in Him. While we should never justify our sins, we do not have to wait until we are living in sinless perfection (which is never!) to serve the Lord.

This is one of the benefits of reading Christian biographies. If a biography is written well, it does not portray the person as if he or she walked on water. It lets you see the imperfections, immaturity, and blind spots of people who did great things for God because they trusted in Him.

B. Faith Enables Us to Accomplish Things that Could Only Happen by God's Power.

Hebrews 11:33-35a (NASB95)

³³ who **by faith** conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received *back* their dead by resurrection;

The only things in common among this group are "**performed acts of righteousness**" and "**from weakness were made strong**." The rest of the list includes things that are quite impressive, if not totally miraculous.

Faith requires recognizing our weakness, but at the same time, laying hold of God's strength. As Jesus said...

John 15:5 (NASB95)

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

The apostle Paul, who on the surface seems to be a competent and powerful man, confessed...

2 Corinthians 4:7 (NASB95)

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

Every Christian who has accomplished great things for God has known this truth as the very foundation of their efforts.

Are you trusting God now in things beyond your comfort zone or human ability? Are you praying for God to do anything that, if He did it, there could be no human explanation for it? Faith always involves the risk of putting yourself into a situation where, if God does not come through, you will fail miserably. This is not to imply that we should be sloppy about preparation or planning. There is nothing spiritual about impulsiveness. But it is to say that after all of our plans and preparation, we should be praying, "God, if You do not work through me, this whole thing is going to be a colossal failure!" Like Peter stepping out of the boat onto the water, we should be very much aware that if He does not hold us up, we are going to drown!

Despite our flaws, God uses those who trust Him to accomplish things that are explainable only by His power. But God may also choose to bless us with His grace in order to endure horrible trials and persecution.

II. The Blessing of Grace to Endure Horrible Trials.

Hebrews 11:35-38 (NASB95)

Verse 35 begins with ³⁵ Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; (This is an example of the crowning point of our faith in God's power. It does not get any more impressive than that! Yet without skipping a beat, the author continues...) and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a **better** resurrection; ³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ³⁸ (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

After reading the first part of the list, you may be tempted to say, "These guys on the second half of the list must have done something wrong that caused them to be persecuted. Did they lack in faith?" But the author continues...

Hebrews 11:39 (NASB95)

³⁹ And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Those on the second half of the list were just as much people of faith as those in the first half! In fact, you could argue that they had greater faith, because it is not as easy to trust God when you are being scourged, stoned, or sawn in two as it is when you are seeing foreign armies put to flight and the dead raised to life. While all of us, if we could, would sign up to be in the first group, we need to recognize that sometimes God is pleased to withhold spectacular results and bless us instead with His grace in order to endure various trials and persecution.

As Paul once stated concerning his "thorn in the flesh"...

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NASB95)

⁹ And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Our text refutes the current health and wealth myth that is endlessly being preached today, to say the least! It shows us the fierce opposition that Satan has towards the faithful people of God. It reveals the irrational evil that consumes wicked people to inflict such atrocities on the godly. And, it should encourage us to endure rejection, ill-treatment, injustice, and even torture and death, if need be, for the sake of the gospel. If we are willing to suffer for the sake of Christ, we will join a great company of God’s people down through history “of whom the world was not worthy”.

The last two verses of the chapter show us the...

III. The Ultimate Blessing of Eternal Rewards.

Hebrews 11:39-40 (NASB95)

³⁹ And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

“All these” refers to both groups. They all gained approval through their faith, yet none received the "promise".

What does that mean? Many people such as Abraham received some of the promises. Such as the birth of Isaac at a time when they were too old for children. But many of the promises were not received during their lifetime. And **none** of the people under the old covenant received "**the promise**" during their lifetime, which refers to Christ. They saw Him from afar in types and shadows, but we see Him clearly revealed in the New Testament. They were under the old covenant, but God “provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.” That something better is the new covenant in Christ’s blood. The old covenant with its sacrifices could not make the worshipers perfect. But the new covenant has sanctified us.

Hebrews 10:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Old Testament saints were saved, but their salvation was not complete until the cross. Ours is complete because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice.

The author’s point is that if the Old Testament saints were faithful through all of these trials, even though they did not receive the promise of Christ in the flesh, how much more should we be faithful, since we have Christ!

And yet, although we have the promise of Christ, we do not yet have the full experience of the glory that is to be revealed with Him in heaven. **Do we?** And so we must, like the Old Testament saints, live by faith in God’s promise as we await the final consummation when

Jesus returns. We must endure whatever trials come, even persecution, by fixing our eyes on Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Let me sum up this section with four applications. I cannot expand on these, but I encourage you to think about how they apply more extensively to your life:

1. Faith is Ready to Sacrifice Present Comfort for a Future Reward with Christ.

Faith recognizes that this life is very short in comparison with eternity. Listen once again, to what Paul taught us.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NASB95)

¹⁷ For momentary, **light affliction** is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

In Paul's case, this "light affliction" included beatings, imprisonments, being stoned, shipwrecked, and often being in danger of death, among others! When you experience "light affliction," do you grumble or do you joyfully trust God?

2. Faith Lives with a Godly Focus instead of a focus on people or things.

The saints mentioned in our text could endure mocking, scourging, imprisonment, and death because their focus was on God, not on other people or things. They were looking to eternity, not to this vapor of life here.

3. Faith Trusts and Obeys God, Leaving the Results to His Sovereignty.

Some believers will trust and obey God and He will grant spectacular results. Others trust and obey the same mighty God and He enables them to endure horrific trials in His strength. The difference is not in the people or in their faith, but in God's sovereign purpose in each situation. We know the same God that these Old Testament saints knew. But have an advantage in that we know Christ personally. So we should trust Him as they did, whether He chooses to put us to death, as He did with the apostle James, or to deliver us from death for a while, as He did with Peter.

4. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ Counts More than Even Life Itself.

Trust God in whatever difficult situations you face because if you are able to overcome you also will receive **your** eternal rewards. One day soon you will hear...

Matthew 25:21b (NASB95)

²¹ ...'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

What a Day That Will Be!