

Faith is the Victory through Suffering (Heb.11.29-40)

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Hebrews 11:29-40 ²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. 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.

Introduction

We have been working our way through Hebrews 11, which is a huge encouragement to faith. To encourage endurance in the obedience of faith, the writer in effect loads his shotgun and fires away with a tenfold, twelve fold, multi-fold encouragement to faith by listing examples from the OT beginning with the book of Genesis and sweeping across redemptive history. As he moves beyond the time of Moses, he realizes that his brief exhortation may lose its intended brevity (13.22). So, he reloads the shotgun to hit us with another blast of examples in quick succession and with less detail. That is what we have in 11.29-40, more names and less detailed narrative.

If we take in the text as a whole and try to discern what is central, we can see at least two main ideas followed by an application to the readers. So, that is the pattern that we will follow. Broadly speaking, we have victories (11.29-35a ...**who through faith conquered**, v.33) and sufferings (11.35b-38 ...**Others suffered**, v. 36); these are not opposed to each other. How then should we consider these themes? It seems best to try to reflect on them as a unit, as an account of victory through suffering. That gives us this outline. First, we have the victory of faith with suffering in the background (backdrop), and then we have the victory of faith with suffering in the foreground (forefront). Our title is "Faith is the Victory through Suffering."

1A. Faith is the victory with suffering in the background

In this section (11.29-35), we have a sketch of victories with traces of the narratives from the Exodus out of Egypt to the end of the OT. The etchings are truly light because these few verses cover more than a thousand years, roughly from 1500 to 400 B.C. They cover such topics as the conquest of Canaan, the period of the judges (including Samson), the reigns of various kings including David, the activity of Elijah and Elisha, and the era of the prophets who proclaimed righteousness and announced judgment as the nation of Israel went *into* and returned *from* exile outside of the land of promise.

Without question, the victories of record have the context of suffering for they conquer over enemies and through many great trials including their removal from Canaan and their return. The author cites the victories leaving the fact of suffering in the background. He gives a picture in broad brush of the victories in the time of the Exodus and the Conquest followed by victories in the time of the Judges to the end of the OT. Let us consider each.

1) Victories in the Exodus and Conquest in 11.29-31

²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. 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 (11.29-31). In these verses, three blessings of obedient faith stand out. Under Moses (Ex. 14.13-14), the Israelites crossed the Red Sea **as if on dry land** and God delivered them from the vengeance-seeking Egyptian army. Guided by faithful Joshua, the people of Israel encircled Jericho and the walls of the city fell literally without a shot being fired. By faith, Rahab the prostitute found protection in Jericho having welcomed the spies.

2) Victories in the time of the Judges to the end of the OT in 11.32-35a

In quick succession, the author sweeps over the conquest under Joshua to the time of the judges and beyond them. Notice how the listing of people now gives way to a list of striking victories. We have a list of names with no narrative added, followed by a list of narratives with no names attached: **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** (11.32-35a). The names then fade away leaving a single category: **the prophets** (v. 32), as the writer goes on to sketch a number of events.

In the move from persons to events, the author does not lose sight of the place of faith because the accomplishments came about **through faith** (v. 33). Still, he abbreviates what could be a much longer narrative with many more people included; if he tried to do that, he says, **time would fail me** (v. 32).

Now let us consider and try to absorb into our thoughts some of the wonder of the conquests that occurred by faith. Consider the following list of victories God gave in loving-kindness within His providential rule; it is sketchy but sufficient. Follow as I paraphrase 33-35.

- a) Judges and kings conquered kingdoms
- b) Judges enforced justice as did Samuel
- c) They obtained promises entering the land and returning from exile
- d) David and especially Daniel stopped the mouths of lions
- e) They quenched the power of fire as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Babylon
- f) Jeremiah, for example, escaped the edge of the sword
- g) Elijah and many prophets were made strong out of weakness. Likewise, by faith, Moses rallied the weak that faced the Red Sea before them and the Egyptian army behind them to cross the Sea as on dry land saying, "**The Lord will fight for you**" (Ex. 14.14).
- h) They became mighty in war putting foreign armies to flight as did Joshua and David
- j) Women such as the widow of Zarephath received back their dead by resurrection

Faith is the victory that conquers in the name of righteousness by laying hold of the promises of God. By faith a young teen with a sling stood in calm and stopped a lion before he went forth with the same sling to topple the mighty Philistine. By faith, three young men walked through a blazing furnace with "one like the Son of Man." It was faith that gave them strength to subdue foreign armies and by faith mothers received back their children from death by resurrection. These are great things to ponder as encouragements to take up the shield of faith for protection in our spiritual warfare. We will extend these thoughts further when we get to some applications.

2A. Faith is the victory with suffering in the foreground

This list is as pungent as it is brief; it is powerful in its brevity: **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** (vs. 35-38).

What do we have on the list of things that these people experienced? He begins with a very strong word, torture. They suffered many other things such as mocking, flogging, and imprisonment in chains, stoning, and death by saw, death by sword, destitution, affliction,

mistreatment, and wanderings in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves. These facts need to percolate deep into our hearts, noting that the endurance in strength with all of its remarkableness was by faith. God's people conquer even if one dies by the sword and another escapes the edge of the sword. Whether suffering is in the background or in the foreground, faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Having commented on the victory of faith through suffering, we are now able to make some applications.

Applications

Turning to application of these things, we might pause a minute to catch our breath with this question: how are we to find encouragement from this account where suffering is in the foreground? It is one thing to gain ground from consideration of victory with suffering in the background, but it seems to be quite a different thing to expect this with suffering in the foreground.

A point that opens the way to answer this question is in the words, "something better": 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** (11.39-40). These two words lock us into all the greater and better blessings that we have as the people of God upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10.11; Heb. 9.26). Most significant is the fact that we have a better high priest and therefore better things pertaining to salvation (6.9), better hope (7.19), a better covenant (7.22), better promises (8.6), a better sacrifice (9.23), a better possession (10.34), a better country (11.16), and a better [resurrection] life (11.35). Let me try to capture all this by some comments on three things: a better dignity, a better salvation, and a better life.

1) You have a better dignity

The Scripture by the Holy Spirit commends OT saints as people of whom the world is not worthy (v. 38). This is your commendation too by faith in Jesus Christ the risen Lord. This is something to think about: you do not need to go around with your head in the sand before the eyes of this world. In relation to the world, you have no unworthiness, as a matter of fact, the truth is that the people of this fallen world are not worthy of you, even to come into your presence. You have a dignity in Christ that is new and better though you will embrace you status humbly before men. To be sure, you are a sinner, but you are a sinner saved by grace. You have remnants of sin as a child of Adam, but you are a child of the king of glory. The second Adam is your brother who tasted death in your place to protect you forever from the power of sin and death. You are on your way to the city of God, to the new world. That is where you have your true citizenship. The heavenly and eternal Canaan is your inheritance now and forevermore. The right is yours now, the possession of resurrection glory is yet to come. So, now on the way take up the shield of faith and fight the good fight for the glory of your marvelous and gracious king. Be like Joshua; meditate deeply on God's word for strength and courage, as you embrace the promise of His abiding presence: **This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go"** (Josh. 1.8-9). You have a better word for better strength and courage (12.24), so, draw near to God with a sense of greater dignity, with better dignity, in order to walk worthy of such a high and glorious calling.

2) You have a better salvation

It is gospel good news to know that sinners, harlots like Rahab, tax collectors, people like you and I have a greater salvation in which there is great dignity.

Rahab is a testimony to the grace of God in the age of promise; by faith, she received protection from the judgment of God that fell on Canaan as *an intrusion of the final judgment*

ahead of time. Now, in the time of fulfillment, we have the accomplishment of all that was foreshadowed. Through faith in the Lord Jesus, by believing Him, we enter into the kingdom of God to receive *deliverance ahead of time* from the coming final Day of Judgment: **"Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you."** ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him (Mat. 21.31-32). What is amazing in the book of Hebrews is the fact that final judgment, the final Day of Judgment, was endured once and for all by the Lord Jesus in the place of those who trust in Him. What can be greater good news than to hear the proclamation that He bore the punishment of our sins in His own body on the cross? What can be greater good news than to know that there on the cross, the Day of Judgment, wrath, and justice intruded into history ahead of time, fell on Christ, securing eternal redemption for His covenant brothers and sisters? Yes, you have a better salvation than the saints of promise; you are the saints of accomplishment: His accomplishment.

3) A better life

For OT saints, calm hope and comfort, even during torture, was theirs by faith in the promise of the resurrection: **so that they might rise again to a better life** (v. 35). They looked for a better resurrection than those miraculous events that occurred within history, like that of the widow's son in the OT and of Lazarus in the NT. Their hope was riveted to the eternal God who promised and to His promises of eternal Sabbath rest in glory. This is where you must fix your hope in whatever suffering you may face; you must ever look forward. Our dear sister Louise Brown expressed this point with power for me when I called her last Thursday. The conversation was brief because it was difficult for her to talk finding it difficult to breathe. As I tried to recount the promises of God to her, she said these simple and breath-taking words: "I am looking forward." She referred to whatever the Lord has for her. All I could do was to rejoice with her and try to quickly relate some specifics. I said, "Yes, Louise, we have the city in front of us, the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. You are on your way to eternal Sabbath rest in glory."

Well, that is a word for you all; it is a summary of how you can maneuver your way through suffering of whatever kind it may be as you experience trials, tribulations, the opposition of enemies without, the struggles of the battles of sin within, the relentless unfolding of time, aging, sickness, dying, and death. Fix your eyes on the better priest, the one who is a priest forever, the Lord Jesus Christ. Fix your eyes on the better and new covenant and the better resurrection that your Savior guarantees will be yours because He lives through resurrection in the power of an indestructible life. His life is your life. In Him, you already have that indestructible life ahead of time. This brings to mind what Jesus said to Martha: ²⁵ **I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,** ²⁶ **and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?** Do you recall her response? She confessed faith in the Lord Jesus: ²⁷ **She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world"** (Jn. 11.25-27). Be like Martha: give this same confession, "Lord, I believe."

Therefore, take heart and be of good courage. The saints of old suffered and endured by faith in the promises anticipated. You have the promises accomplished in Christ. Be encouraged to know that you will also endure with greater dignity and greater life, both now and not yet, because of the one who promised and because Jesus Christ risen from the dead is your great and faithful high priest in glory forever. There at the right hand of the Father, He continues to mediate *to you* all the blessing He secured *for you* in His death on the cross.

Let us fall down before the majesty of our great high priest who intercedes for us in the power of an indestructible life; may the Holy Spirit teach us how to love Him better and better and His church more and more because the fruits of His saving work include the blessings we have of a better sacrifice, a better covenant, better things pertaining to salvation, and for us a better life. To the triune God be all glory, now and forevermore, amen.