

## **Through Faith Made Strong Hebrews 11:32-40**

### **Introduction**

As the writer of Hebrews wraps up his survey of those who lived by faith, he gives us a summary of what living by faith looks like. In so doing he reminds us that we are part of the same grand history. Your life may feel mundane. You may feel that you are weak and insignificant in this epic story. But your faith in Christ changes all that. Christ is your hope. Christ is your glory. And for that reason, your life of faith matters.

<sup>32</sup> 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— <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> 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— <sup>38</sup> of

whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

<sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

1. Faith to Conquer (32-35a)

2. Faith to Suffer (35b-38)

3. Faith to Wait (39-40)

### **1. Faith to Conquer (32-35a)**

<sup>32</sup> 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—

There are so many examples of how God rewarded those who put their faith in Him that there's not time to list them all. God's interventions on behalf of those who trust Him are not few and far between. The writer of Hebrews mentions the names of some without going into the specifics of each case, and then moves on to many unnamed cases. He just gives categories of the kinds of things radically changed by faith in God.

The point is this. There are more stories to be told than can be counted. Hebrews points to these examples to encourage his readers to live by faith. God has not quit intervening on

behalf of those whose faith is rooted in Him. God had not retired from the intervention business in the first century. Nor has He done so in the twenty-first. The stories of faith are not done because God is not done.

### **Gideon (Judges 6-8)**

Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."

Gideon answered, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?

Destroyed altar of Baal—Jerubbaal—"Let Baal contend."

Fleece

Reduced from 32,000 down to 300 against an army of the Midianites and Amalekites like locusts, camels without number, like sand of the seashore in abundance.

### **Barak (Judges 5)**

Deborah the prophetess, who was judging Israel at the time, summoned him to raise a army to defeat Sisera with all his iron chariots. "If you will go with me, I will go." Otherwise, not.

Answer to him—"I will go with you, but Sisera will be sold into the hand of a woman" (Jael). Heavy rain mired the chariots. Canaanite army routed, Sisera killed—a tent peg through his head.

### **Samson (Judges 13-16)**

Mother barren

A Nazirite from birth—no fruit of the vine, no cutting of hair

Tremendous strength—lion; 1,000 Philistine warriors; gate posts of the city

But attracted to pagan women (Philistines)—his downfall but God used it against the

Philistines to break their power over Israel

More killed in his death (3,000) than during his career

### **Jephthah (Judges 11-12)**

Son of a prostitute, rejected by his brothers

Led Israel against the Ammonites after their refusing to negotiate. Jephthah shows a

strong knowledge of Hebrew history. Rash

vow—offer as sacrifice whatever and

whomever greeted him upon his return in

victory—turned out to be his only daughter.

### **David**

Man after God's own heart

Shepherd-warrior-singer-Psalmist-king

Goliath

Fugitive from Saul

Jewish king to whom were compared all

subsequent kings of Israel/Judah

Adultery with Bathsheba—murder of Uriah

Absalom's rebellion

### **Samuel**

Born to a long barren woman—Hannah

A child when God first spoke to him and  
through him  
Led a revival of true religion  
Established a school of the prophets  
Anointed Saul  
Anointed David  
Sons followed him as judges but not as good

All flawed—Gideon and Barak fearful; Samson  
lacked self-control; Jephthah—rash vow;  
David—Israel's greatest warrior-king, but  
guilty of adultery and murder  
Samuel—exemplary, but his sons a  
disappointment

*Not about their greatness, but God's. God  
uses flawed human beings. Jesus was the  
only perfect human ever. Everyone else a  
sinner with a life history of many failures. The  
value of faith is its object. God is not  
thwarted by your imperfections. The question  
is just whether or not you will lean the weight  
of your trust on Him. Let your life story be  
about God's greatness not yours. You and I  
have no idea what all God will do through us.*  
The greatest victories human beings have  
experienced came from His hand and  
happened according to His will. If people can  
explain all your successes purely in terms of  
your own human wisdom and abilities, there's  
little glory to God in that.

## **And the prophets**

Heard from God and spoke what they heard to people

Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi—those are just the ones whose prophecies are written in the Scriptures. They were called to exercise the courage of speaking up against powerful trends and sinful leaders. Beyond them are prophets like Elijah and Elisha, along with hundreds of others, who did not write a book of the Bible, but who spoke the word of the Lord to their generation—often ignored or hated, sometimes revered, but faithful to the God who sent them.

History is still that way. *We have only a sampling of the names of those God has used to spread His words to others. But He knows His servants well, every one of them.* Very few if any will remember our names 50 years after we are gone, but God knows each of His children by name, and every turn of their hearts and every word and deed they've done in His name. They are members of His forever family, citizens of an everlasting kingdom, names written down in the Lamb's Book of Life, loved from before the foundation of the world.

Their deeds of faith are many and stunning, the stuff of sacred history—a history that

continues to this day and will till the consummation of the age.

**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.

**conquered kingdoms**—conquest of Canaan

**enforced justice**—literally, “righteousness”; what a difference leaders whose faith is in God make in a community or nation, sometimes whole civilizations! Whatever influence and responsibilities you have, are you through faith advancing God’s righteousness?—doing true justice—very different from the destructive forces at work today that use justice language but practice wickedness.

**obtained promises**—promised land; throne given to David long before he acquired it

**stopped the mouths of lions**—Daniel

**quenched the power of fire**—Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego

Daniel 3:15, 17-18

**15** Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

**17** If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **18** But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

**escaped the edge of the sword**—exodus through the Red Sea; David in battles unnumbered, a fugitive from Saul

**were made strong out of weakness**—Gideon, Barak—principle of the power of God greater than human power

**became mighty in war**—Judges, David

**put foreign armies to flight**—Judges, David, Jonathan, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah

2 Chronicles 20:3-6

**3** Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. **4** And Judah assembled



to seek help from the LORD; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. <sup>5</sup> And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, <sup>6</sup> and said, "O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you."

2 Chronicles 20:12

"O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

The Spirit of God came upon Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, and gave these words:

<sup>15</sup> "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's. . . . <sup>17</sup> You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you."

**35a** Women received back their dead by resurrection.

1 Kings 17—Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son

2 Kings 4—Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son

Jesus raised the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7)

Jesus raised daughter of Jairus (Luke 8)

Jesus raised Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha (John 11)

Peter raised Dorcas (Acts 9)

Paul raised Eutychus (Acts 20)

All these died again, but there is a coming resurrection that will swallow up death forever. Death will not only be no more. Its brutal work will be utterly reversed. Jesus' own resurrection is the firstfruits—the first sampling of that great day of harvest.

1 Corinthians 15:53

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

What sorrow and tears death brings to our lives. What grim destruction of the human body it works in us over the years. But Christ redeems us from the power of death and the grave. No more death. No more sorrow. No more sickness. No more pain. Therefore, no more tears. God will wipe every last one away (Revelation 21).

How is it that any of us can experience that level of freedom and untainted joy? Faith in Christ, conqueror of sin and death. His power at work in us. Not our own power. The ultimate “out of weakness made strong.”

If even death is no match for the God in whom you’ve put your trust, what enemy can you possibly face that cannot be conquered?

Some false teachers preach that faith will always bring health, wealth, success—if you have enough of it. It’s a lie.

Our text makes that abundantly clear. God gives victories, but He also takes His true children through deep pain.

## **2. Faith to Suffer (35b-38)**

<sup>35b</sup> Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> 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—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Suffering and death is common to all mankind. Abandoning the faith will not free

you from suffering. Nor will trusting in Jesus free you from suffering in this world.

*But suffering has a way of exposing where our faith lies. It can purify our lives. God has often used it as a wake-up call.* How many have gotten serious about their sin and mortality because of illness and injury, even bringing them to repent and trust in Jesus.

There is a kind of suffering people endure precisely because of their faith. They could escape the suffering if they abandoned their faith, but they refused to do so. Their faith through suffering glorifies Christ because it highlights how highly they value Him above every pleasure and need.

### **Public ridicule and punishment of the people of faith as if they were criminals**

- Tortured—to be stretched out on a wheel and beaten; a torture method used during the time of the Maccabees; one account tells of seven brothers executed one after another by Antiochus Epiphanes. They were promised release if they would but eat pig's flesh as demonstration of their rejection of Yahweh and acceptance of pagan worship. They boldly spoke of their resurrection and of God's judgment on their tormentors. Why else

would martyrs be willing to be burned, stoned, beheaded but for their confidence that their death for Jesus was not the end anymore than His crucifixion was the end of Him.

- Mocking—part of the dehumanizing process
- Flogging—as Christ was
- Chains and imprisonment—Jeremiah; Paul

### **Put to death**

- Stoned—true prophets treated as false; Stephen; Paul
- Sawn in two—historical tradition reports that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two in his old age by King Manasseh
- Killed with the sword—James, brother of John; Paul

### **Deprived of basic necessities**

- Insufficient clothing—skins of sheep and goats
- Destitute—to lack, to suffer need, to go without
- Afflicted—pressure, restrict, make narrow, oppressed, distressed, hard pressed
- Mistreated—handled in an evil way; to harm, torment

- Homeless—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth

Hebrews 11:38

Of whom the world was not worthy

The world in rebellion against God considered them unfit for society, even unfit to live—  
toxic, hateful, ignorant, a menace, sub-human. But they were actually better than the world deserved.

Most of us have never had to live through such persecution, but many brothers and sisters are experiencing these things even now. Should persecution come your way, faith in Christ equips you for such days every bit as much as for the great victories. Do not fear. Through faith find strength—strength in God alone.

### **3. Faith to Wait (39-40)**

<sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

God is bearing testimony that these are people of faith, but they did not receive what was promised—they had to wait. If you count someone truly reliable to make good on their

promises, your faith in them, by its very nature, makes you willing to wait for the fulfillment. If you don't believe them, you don't wait around.

The OT believers waited a lifetime without seeing the Messianic promises fulfilled. But they counted God reliable not only to do what He said He would do but to do it whenever and however He chose.

First-century believers like the Christians the letter of Hebrews was written to got to see the fulfillment of God's promises to send the Messiah—Immanuel, the God-man Savior-King. Pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the innocent Lamb slain to take away our sins, the conquering King who broke the power of death and rose from the grave and forty days later ascended into heaven with the promise to come back.

The OT saints looked forward. The NT saints saw Christ firsthand. We look back to His first coming and look forward to His second.

Luke 10:24

For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect—complete. Christ unites us. He is the focal point.

*There is a solidarity of faith between those who look for the fulfillment of the promises and those who actually get to see them come to pass.* More promises are yet to be fulfilled, so while we look back to the days many Messianic prophecies were fulfilled we also look forward to the day all is complete. We belong to a great cloud of believers whose lives of faith testified to the reliability of God's promises. Many have run their race before us and there are many more to follow. Chapter 12 will exhort us to live accordingly.

You may be struggling with doubts because of the hard struggles you're having to endure and the seemingly endless delay of divine intervention in a world where evil reigns and good is scorned and punished. Will deliverance ever come?

But will you take notice that *God is not playing games with you. He's not doing a bait-and-switch. He's told you up front that waiting is part of the life of faith. This is not new. It is not odd. It is the way life is for now.* But it will pay off. God will not fail to deliver on what He has promised.



## Romans 8:18-23

**18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

We live only one day at a time, so live today in faith. When tomorrow comes, do the same. Each day brings you a step closer to your journey's destination. Don't lose heart. Don't lose courage. Don't lose hope. Keep the faith. The Lord is with us, and the battle is His. The outcome is secure.

Remember that the gospel is not advice about what you must do. It is good news about what God has done.

## **Conclusion**

1. Faith to Conquer
2. Faith to Suffer
3. Faith to Wait

## **Discussion Questions**

1. The writer of Hebrews admits that the people of faith he recalls are only a small sampling. There are many more in Biblical history and in church history since then. What do these facts tell you about how common it is for God to reward faith in Him, including yours?
2. Most of the men Hebrews 11:32-34 names had glaring weaknesses and sins, not just stunning victories. How does that help you in what to expect in your own walk of faith?
3. Why would God do such mighty things through such flawed people?
4. In what ways does faith to suffer bring God glory every bit as much if not more than faith to conquer?
5. What does the record of suffering saints faithful to God reveal about the integrity of a prosperity "gospel" of health, wealth, success for all who have faith in God?

6. What are some ways God uses suffering for good?
7. What are some reasons waiting for God to fulfill His promises can be so hard?
8. What are some reasons waiting for God to fulfill His promises is so important to our living a life of faith?
9. In what ways does it help you to know you belong to a long train of God's people past, present, and future who belong to Christ and thus live by faith?