

The Courage of Faith

Heb. 11:30-40

³⁰By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. ³²And 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, ³³who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; ³⁶and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They 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. ³⁹And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰because God had provided something better for us so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

“Faith is trusting completely in God’s Word. It is unconditional confidence in what He says, strictly on the basis that He has said it. The fact is that we either trust what God says or we are left to trust our own intellect, instincts and attitudes. There are our only two options. Our own way is the way of unbelief; God’s way is the way of faith.”¹ (John MacArthur)

As we have walked through much of Hebrews 11 we have seen those that are honored in God’s hall of fame as those who acted on God’s Word, sometimes risking all. They acted, though against their own personal interests or desires, in obedience to God’s commands and promises.

In the first century it was costly for a Jew to become a Christian. “It often cost him his friends, family, synagogue privileges, rituals, and traditions which Jews held so dear – including some that had been instituted by God for a certain time. The Jews receiving this epistle were tempted to try to keep a foot in both worlds, to

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), p. 360.

accept Christianity while holding onto as much of Judaism as possible. Some were trying to take the voyage of the New Covenant while keep their boats securely tied to the dock of the Old.”²

The writer of this epistle was making it clear that Jesus Christ was the ultimate revelation and fulfillment of all that had gone before.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.” (Heb. 1:1-4)

The ultimate revelation of God is Christ; in Him we place our faith.

The entire epistle speaks of the superiority of Jesus Christ to angels, the rest, the priesthood, the Covenants and the sacrifices. Chapter 12:2 calls Jesus ***the Author and Perfector of our faith***. Chapter 11 celebrates all the heroes of history that were honored by God because of their faith.

Four Kinds of faith:

Faith that Receives – someone comes to Christ for salvation as a sinner with nothing to offer but empty hands. Saving Faith.

Faith that Reckons – counts on God to undertake – The more you know the more confident you become. Overcomes personal needs - Personal Faith.

Faith that Risks – moves out in God’s power, daring to do the impossible – Empowering Faith

Faith that Rests – sits back in confidence that God will deliver. Enduring Faith

I. Receiving and Reckoning Faith

The courage and struggle

The first section is about the first struggle and courage of the children of Israel faced in the Promised Land – Jericho.

³⁰By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

Jericho was a fortress city. Its walls were massive structures that two chariots could drive on side-by-side. (85’ thick/ 100’ tall) Being a frontier city located by

² Ibid.

the Jordan river it was purposefully designed to protect the land from the greatest enemy attacks.

Where was Israel coming from to bring about such an assault on this fortress city? Forty years in the wilderness. They weren't the same people as those who by faith crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, drowning the Egyptian army. Those folks all died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, grumbling, and idolatry, made them unworthy of entering the Promised Land. 1 Cor. 10:1-11 this section gives severe warning to Christian believers not to be like the children of Israel who were destroyed in the wilderness as an example to us.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so we would not crave evil things as they craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were... Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did...nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed...Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer...Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Cor. 10:6-11)

Those who entered the Promised Land were the children of those who had been delivered from Egypt. Everyone 20 and above died in the wilderness except Caleb and Joshua. Those who faced the city of Jericho followed Joshua, their leader, and obediently marched around the city for seven days. On the seventh day they marched around (silently) seven times, then shouted and blew horns by faith, and watched God knocked down all the walls. Their only weapon was faith.

It is because of faith that many of our struggles come,
and it is only by faith that our struggles can be faced and conquered.

Rahab

³¹By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

Rahab was unlikely to be honored by God in the faith chapter. She was a prostitute, a Gentile and a Canaanite at that. While her society was in disbelief and disobedient. When spies from Israel came to Jericho, Rahab welcomed them into her home. She also hid them from the authorities. She believed what they said, and as a result was spared with her family when they conquered the city. Jericho was a wicked and unbelieving city.

MacArthur writes,

“The destruction of the Canaanites was as great a social as it was a spiritual gain to the welfare of humanity. They were a debauched, idolatrous, and wicked people. They were noted for their grossly immoral and perverted sexual practices as well as for their general cruelty. Among the other things, they frequently put live babies in jars and built them into their city walls as foundation sacrifices. They were begging for judgment.”³

Rahab welcomed the spies in peace, confessing,

“The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath”
(Josh. 2:11).

She demonstrated courageous faith and was spared and honored by God. She married and became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, who was the great grandmother of David, and included in the lineage of Jesus.

The writer to the Hebrews goes on and lists many other “hall of famers”, along with what they accomplished by faith.

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, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 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. (11:32-34)

II. Risking Faith- Courage in exceptional circumstances.

Some heroes were mighty in war, conquering great enemies. Others faced grave situations in which they were delivered by their faith. All these were honored by God for their courageous faith.

Gideon was a judge and military leader. His army of 32,000 men to fight the Midianites and the Amalekites was shrunk down to 300 based on how they drank water from a spring. The enemy’s army was vast and were without number. Yet they were routed by Gideon’s army armed with trumpets and clay jars.

³ MacArthur, p. 364.

Barak commanded the Israeli forces of 10,000 against Sisera, who commanded a large, powerful army, with 900 iron chariots. Through Deborah, the judge, God promised that Israel would be delivered from the Canaan king Jabin, and his famous commander. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army, with the edge of the sword” (Judg. 4:15). Barak didn’t claim any credit or glory fro the victory, but freely gave it to God and to all the ladies God used. Barak wasn’t concerned about Sisera’s power, because he had God’s power. By his faith he conquered kingdoms.

Samson wasn’t remembered for his faith but his physical strength and moral weakness. Someone has said that he was a he-man with a she-weakness. Samson was a judge over Israel and specifically used as a ‘Terminator’ against the Philistines. He was a one-man army, a superman. God remembers Samson for his faith in how he trusted God to supply his power.

Jephthah preceded Samson as judge of Israel. His job was to subdue the Ammonites. We remember his foolish vow, but God remembered his faith.

David was considered one of the greatest men of the Old Testament. He was called by God, “a man after My heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22). When he was a boy he stood against the great Philistine warrior, Goliath, and defeated him with a slingshot. While everyone else was afraid, David stood against the giant with fearless courage and faith. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you.” (1 Sam. 17:46)

Samuel, though not a warrior, was added to the list of warriors. His battles were equal to any soldiers. His enemies were idolatry and immorality. “He had to stand up in the middle of a polluted society and fearlessly speak God’s truth. His severest opponents frequently were not the Philistines, the Amorites, or Ammonites – but his own people.” He stood against his friends, and peers, and fellow Israelites when they were wrong. Samuel was a prophet and Israel’s last judge. He served the Lord all his life and continued faithful.

The Prophets were unnamed as were other faithful people of the Old Covenant. Like the others they risked everything for the Lord.

“They cheerfully, courageously and confidently accepted God’s commands and faced whatever opposition came along. Though not on a battlefield, they too conquered through the courage of faith.

who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire,

A list of accomplishments is included in this section that points to certain specific saints. Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den. His contemporaries were cast into a superheated fire. The lions became pillows and the fire only burned off the ropes they were bound by. It was by faith that they accomplished these miraculous works of power. This theme carries into the next section on suffering.

III. Resting Faith: Suffering with courage

Still others overcame by resting in the promises of God.

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The women who received their loved ones back from the dead had to endure their dying before receiving them back. They went through the greatest difficulties by faith. Still others refused to compromise and ease their torture, because they lived and died for the reward of a better resurrection. This section is all about suffering and enduring persecution and great trials of torture, imprisonments, temptations, and executions. They wandered as homeless refugees and lived in hardships, looking to heaven as their ultimate home. They gained approval through their faith and “did not receive what was promised.” They understood that faith rests in God’s “something better” as they trust God and endure.

Sometimes affliction is inescapable; sometimes it is not. To the person of faith, no affliction is escapable that requires denial or compromise of God's Word.

They were counting on their salvation. They courageously struggled, suffered, and endured because they believed all of God's Word that they had. That's why God honored them.