

Lighthouses of Faith

by A.B. Simpson

Faith is the key to experiencing God's strength, presence, and guidance in our lives.

Scripture: Judges 4:14, Judges 6:34, Psalm 51:7, Isaiah 40:31, Mark 11:24, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 14:3, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 11:32

Topics: "Faith in Adversity", "Heroes of Faith"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the role of faith as a guiding light during dark times, using examples from the Old Testament such as Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel. Each figure exemplifies different aspects of faith, from Gideon's strength in weakness to David's ability to wait for God's timing. Simpson illustrates that true faith often emerges in adversity and is not reliant on human strength or circumstances. He encourages believers to trust in God's promises and to act in faith, as demonstrated by these biblical heroes. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a faith that listens to God and speaks His truth to the world.

Transcript

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets" (Heb. 11: 32).

Lighthouses indeed they were, these men of faith that illuminated the darkest periods of Old Testament history, from the time of the Judges to the great reformation under Samuel. Sad as was the story of the wilderness when Israel wandered for forty years, it was not half so sad as the declension after Joshua's conquest of Canaan and the glorious inheritance of the Land of Promise, which was not for forty, but for four hundred years. But the lighthouse is not kindled for placid seas and sunlit skies, but for starless nights and raging storms. And so these troublous times brought out the highest and noblest types of faith and character in all the story of the past. In like manner it will be found that in our own experience faith is born not of favorable circumstances and comfortable surroundings, but of deep afflictions, temptations, and sorrows.

Out of this humiliating chapter of Israel's history, the apostle selects half a dozen unique examples of the highest faith and the noblest achievement. Each is a distinct type, and all together form a third series and reach a still higher climax.

I. GIDEON; OR FAITH FINDING STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

1. We see this illustrated in Gideon's call. Hiding from the Midianites in his threshing floor, and trying by stealth to thresh a little grain for his daily supply, Gideon is visited by the angel of the Lord and greeted with this surprising message: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Never was mortal more startled and mortified by such a message. It seemed as if even God was mocking him. He a mighty man of valor, indeed! Rather might he be called a miserable coward. And very naturally he began to remonstrate and tell of his own insignificance and the overwhelming trials that had fallen upon his people. But God quickly reminded him that it was not his might, but the might of Jehovah in which he was to go, and that taking this by faith he was, notwithstanding all his insignificance, a mighty man of valor. "Go in this thy might," said God, "and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" And so Gideon put on the strength of God by faith, and a little later we find this striking expression regarding him: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon [clothed] Gideon" (Judges 6: 34), and henceforth the feeble coward was the mighty man of valor.

2. We see this illustrated in Gideon's company. At his summons thirty-two thousand men gathered from Israel to fight the battle of freedom. But God told him that he could not use so many. And so the sifting process began. Reduction is not always loss. When that diamond is cut back from six hundred carats to less than one hundred, its value is multiplied ten times over, and every new facet cut in its form adds to its glorious luster. And so when God would strengthen His work He often reduces its apparent proportions. First, He allowed them to sift themselves as He still often does with us. Gideon was ordered to tell all the timid ones that they might go home, and soon twenty-two thousand men were marching back. In like manner, still, God often frightens away from a work the people that are in the way. He makes the reproach so heavy and the sacrifices so great that they cannot stand it, and they leave to find something easier and more honorable.

But there are still too many. It is necessary that they be sifted again. As they drink from the brook all those are set aside who drink with weariness and caution, dipping up the water like a dog from hand to mouth and watching meanwhile against surprise, while the rest, who go down upon their knees and drink with reckless abandon as though there were no danger and no foe to watch are sent away. These men will not do for the Lord's work. He wants hearts that are alert, minds that are wide awake, and soldiers that He can depend upon. Let us not think that faith means dullness. God does not need a great many men, but He must have the right kind. So Gideon's three hundred are all that are left, but these are enough, and with this little host Midian's myriads are hurled back in disaster and destruction.

3. Again we see this principle illustrated in Gideon's conflict and victory. The battle must be fought by faith as well as the army prepared. First, Gideon must get his token from the Lord and know that it will be victory. With a single companion he is sent to Midian's hosts to reconnoiter, and as the two listen on the borders of the camp, lo! a Midianite has awakened from his sleep and is telling his comrades the dream he has just had of Gideon's cake of barley tumbling into the host of Midian. That is enough. It is God's token of coming victory. Gideon hastes back to prepare for the assault. Surely the weapons of that warfare are weapons of faith: fragile pitchers, useful only when they are shattered into broken fragments; flaming torches and rude trumpets proclaiming the name of God and the sword of Gideon -- this is all. And these are still weapons of our victorious warfare. We, ourselves, must become as broken vessels, and then the light will shine through our displacement, and the message which we ring out will become the power of God to the salvation of men and the destruction of the enemy. It is still as true as ever that the greatest hindrance to God's working is dependence on human genius, wealth, influence, and power, and that the men whom God is using today are the men who have learned to say with Paul, "Therefore will I rather

glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." When tens of thousands were thronging Mr. Moody's meetings in London, the leading journal of England sent an experienced reporter to find out the secret of his power. He listened for several days and then declared that he could see nothing in the manner or the matter of the evangelist's addresses to interest such multitudes of people or to explain this movement. When Mr. Moody heard of it he laughed quietly and said: "Why that is the very secret of the movement, that there is nothing in it that can explain it but the power of God." It is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord."

II. BARAK; OR THE PRESENT TENSE OF FAITH

Barak had gone forth at the call of Deborah, willing to take second place to a woman in the work of the Lord, and to receive from her lips the keynote of his victory. Very finely does she give it in Judges 4: 14. Her name signifies a bee, and there is a wholesome sharpness in her words that might well wake him up from his languor and delay. "Up"; she cries, "for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee?" Here we have the very essence of faith. It is stepping out to meet a God who has already stepped out in front of us. It is not waiting for something to turn up, or hoping for something to happen, but it is instant action, accepting and not expecting.

One day I listened to a very humble colored man as he told the wonderful story of his experience and the way God had used him, which I knew to be true, and then he told us that all this had begun by his one day taking literally a single verse in the eleventh chapter of Mark: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them," or, as he put it: "Believe that you take them and you've got them." Sinner, Christ meets you as He met the paralytic at Capernaum saying, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." If you believe it this moment it is true for you. Discouraged and defeated one, He meets thee as He met Gideon, and He says: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." If you take Him at His word it becomes a living fact in your experience as it was in Gideon's. Sinful, struggling soul, He says to thee: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." If you take it, it is true for you and you go forth cleansed through His precious blood. Sick one, this is the secret of your healing. "The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." And this is the prayer of faith: "Believe that ye receive . . . and ye shall have." God is always speaking in the present tense. He lives in one "eternal now," and this is where faith must also dwell with Him, moment by moment taking Him for each new deed and having only what we take. O ye that are lingering, leaning, and losing your blessing, "Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered [your enemy] into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee?"

III. SAMSON; OR THE FAITH THAT BRINGS PHYSICAL STRENGTH

If Samson had lived today he would have been the leading man in all our college clubs, and no price would have been too high to secure him for the football team, and the athletic tournaments that so rapidly are turning American brains into heels, hands, punch bags, and prize fights. But Samson's strength was not that of material brawn, but a far more subtle and supernatural power. It came to him through the touch of faith and the Spirit of God. Away back in those Old Testament times we have three object lessons of this kind of strength that even a material age can appreciate: the strength that enabled Abraham and Sara to defy the decaying power of age and natural infirmity, and claim the fulfillment of the great promise of a child when naturally it was impossible, and the strength that clothed Samson with more than Herculean power when probably his own frame was not materially stronger in himself than any of his fellows. Samson's strength could not have come from gigantic stature or exceptionally developed muscle, for we

know that in a single moment he lost it, and yet he had probably not lost an ounce of weight, but had touched the forbidden earth and lost the secret of the Lord. Samson's physical strength was a vital principle that came to him from the unseen world and the living One, and it came to teach us that there is for our mortal frame a life and strength in God which we may claim as surely as the power that quickens our soul. For One has lived on earth since Samson's day who contained in His own human frame the power that could raise the dead and heal the sick, and who has become for us, in His resurrection life, the second Head of redeemed humanity and the living Source from which we can take our perfect life for body and for brain. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

But Samson teaches us one lesson more; namely, that the supernatural life of God in the human body is dependent upon our separation from the world and sin. We can only retain it while we live in His holy will, and we lose it whenever we touch the forbidden world of evil. There is nothing that is so sanctifying as the life of Christ in your mortal flesh. There is nothing that so holds you to a life of separation and dedication. If Christ is dwelling in your body that body must be used as His holy temple and for the things that Christ Himself would do if He were living in your place. This then, beloved, is one of the providences of faith, to take the Lord for supernatural strength, and give it back to Him in living sacrifice and loving service.

IV. JEPHTHAH; OR THE FAITH THAT KEEPS FAITH WITH GOD

Jephthah was an outcast. He was born under discouraging circumstances, repudiated by his father's house, and covered with a stigma of reproach from his mother, for which he was not responsible. But instead of giving up to discouragement, he turned to God for help, and God always loves to take up the cause of the wronged one. Is there a soul within reach of this message whose life has been crushed by some misfortune, wrong, or hereditary entail for which you were not to blame? Beloved, Jephthah's God will be your Vindicator and your almighty Friend. Nay, even if there has been wrong and fault and folly, and you are suffering from the effects of your own mistake, still there is One that will "restore the years that the locust hath eaten," and undo the bitter past. And so the time came when Jephthah's brethren turned to him to lead the forlorn hope of their country's struggle, and with his brave freebooters to give them back their freedom. Jephthah was not slow to respond, and in due time his courage was crowned with victory. As he prepared for the battle he vowed to give to God the first thing that he should meet, and the sequel gave a singular opportunity for illustrating another of the highest qualities of faith. It was his own and only daughter whom he met leading the triumphal dance of Israel's maidens in celebration of his victory. "Alas, my daughter!" he cried, as he rent his clothes, "thou has brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." We do not believe that this sacrifice meant the literal immolation of his child on an altar of blood, but rather the dedication of her life in perpetual virginity to the service of God. This is confirmed by the later references (Judg. 11: 37, 40). What all this meant to Jephthah and his daughter can only be understood by one who realizes all that posterity meant to an Israelite, especially to a ruler like Jephthah, who longed for an heir, and more especially to every Hebrew woman, who felt herself the possible mother of the coming Messiah.

But Jephthah was true to his pledge. Not for a moment did he falter in his purpose of obedience, and so he stands to latest ages a type of the man who not only can count upon God, but a man upon whom God can depend.

Beloved, if you expect God to keep faith with you, how can you forget that God expects as much of you? Therefore, faith and obedience go hand in hand. Oh, to live so that God can say of us as He said of

Abraham, "I know him," I can depend upon him, I can fulfill to him all that I have promised.

V. DAVID; OR THE FAITH THAT CAN WAIT GOD'S TIME AND STILL, CLAIM GOD'S PROMISE

David was anointed king over Israel years before he ever sat upon his throne. Indeed the very first result of his anointing was a long period of persecution, trial, and the apparent defeat and defiance of all that God had given. For nine years he wandered a refugee in the mountains of Judah, hunted for his life by the hate of Saul; and still through it all, he counted himself God's anointed king and held himself with the lofty dignity of an heir of promise.

So faith on our part can discount the future, and while the promise seems to tarry, still hear His voice whispering: "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Next we see the faith of David strengthening his hands for battle and girding him with power in the conflict with his foes. Speaking of this in the Psalms he says, "It is God that girdeth me with strength." "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." It was faith that fought the battle with Goliath. It was faith that went into every conflict asking God, "Shall I go up against them? Wilt Thou deliver them into my hand?" It was faith that took the victory before the battle began and gave God the glory. So still we fight the good fight of faith, and like David may exercise the faith by which God's heroes "out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

But the last, and perhaps the highest exercise of David's faith was in the dark hour of its eclipse, when through subtle temptation he sank into his double crime and fell under the judgment of his God. That is the darkest hour in the history of a soul, and only faith can save it from utter despair. It was then that David's faith reached up from the depths and the darkness until it found God and put on record its simple and sublime confidence in that tender penitential psalm, in which deeply conscious of his guilt and sin he still could cry in his confidence in the power of divine grace: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." To believe that God could thus save him from the uttermost to the uttermost was indeed a faith that reaches down to the deepest experiences of New Testament times.

VI. SAMUEL AND THE PROPHETS; OR THE FAITH THAT HEARKENS AND THEN SPEAKS FOR GOD

It was Samuel who began his life of faith by the simple response: "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth." This is the first attitude for all who would be messengers and voices for God. They must first hearken and be good listeners before they learn to speak. The true watchword of every effectual witness for God must ever be: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned."

And having learned to hear, Samuel next was as faithful in repeating the message and giving forth the word of God. Therefore he became the prophet of the Lord and the founder of the school of the prophets which remained through all succeeding times the truest body of men among all the classes of ancient Israel. When kings and priests and princes failed, still the prophets were true to God. The prophetic office has been continued in the New Testament Church. It does not consist merely of men who can foretell future events, but is thus defined: "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3). He, then, who speaks to men to edification, exhortation, and comfort is a true prophet of the Lord. God wants men in this and every age who can thus represent Him, who can catch the message from above and echo it out around the world. But our words are weak and vain unless we get

them first from God. Our messages must be burned into our souls. Our texts must take us before we take them. Our preaching must be the giving out of our very life. We must get the Word at His mouth and warn them from Him. Then the least message that we speak by the wayside, in the inquiry room, in the hospital, in the prison, or from the pulpit will be a prophetic word. It will go just as far as the height from which it comes. God will go with it and as He said it will "not return unto me void, but will accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it." A man may speak ever so eloquently; he may prepare his address with scholarship and rhetoric and polished sentences; he may give it with the most impressive elocution; and yet it may be the voice not of a prophet, but of a parrot. He is simply repeating something that he has heard from man. It is the message of God the world wants, and it is the men of God that must give it. Oh, for the faith that knows how to get from Him His word for the age in which we live, His message to the men of today, and give it to all the world.

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