

Faith in Your Struggles

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Hebrews chapter 11, highlighting the faith of various Old Testament figures who faced trials, victories, and sufferings. It emphasizes that faith is not about always achieving success but about enduring and trusting God, even in the midst of hardships. The message underscores the importance of trusting God regardless of outcomes, focusing on God's approval rather than worldly recognition, and looking forward to the eternal promises through faith.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:32, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 11:39, Hebrews 12:2, James 1:12, 1 Peter 1:7, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Romans 8:18, Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Endurance in Faith", "Trusting God Through Trials"

Description

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Transcript

Hebrews chapter 11 as we continue our study through the book of Hebrews. I've set a pretty tight schedule to try and finish by the end of April. So let's, so we're going to deal with quite a few verses this morning and let's read those from verse 32.

So Hebrews chapter 11 reading from 32 through the end of the chapter. Hebrews 11 32 through 40. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourging, yes and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sown in two, were tempted, were slain with a sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise. God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. And so the writer has gone through numerous examples of men of faith, and how that faith functioned in the Old Testament.

Now he comes to a point where he says, well, you know, I have to draw a line at some stage. If I kept using the examples, well, it would take a long time. And so he begins to just give us a list of names, and then of things that happened.

Now this is an important point that we need to remember, and that is that Hebrews 11 does not contain all the names of those who were believers, and those who pleased God in the Old Testament. Remember how we please God. Those who come to Him, the beginning of the chapter says, must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seeking.

And without faith, it is impossible to please God. And so how did these men in the Old Testament please God? They pleased Him, not necessarily by the things they did, but by faith. And so sometimes I've heard folks say, well, you know, this man in the Old Testament, he maybe wasn't saved because he's not in Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11 is not a definitive list of those who were saved, and I'm using saved in the New Testament sense, and we'll come back to that at the end of the of the section, but it's not a complete list of everyone who pleased God in the Old Testament. There were many others, and we see that in this passage, because he's given detailed examples of Noah, and of Abraham, and of Moses, but now he's going to just mention some names, and then he's going to mention some results of faith, without names. And so you can see that there is much more to be said that is not included in Hebrews 11.

And so he says, what more shall I say? In other words, I could go on forever, but the time would fail me. I don't have enough time. I think he was a typical preacher, and we said that at the very beginning, that the book of Hebrews is written as an expository sermon, taking the Old Testament as examples, and finding application, or making application from that.

And so this is a typical problem that any preacher has. There's just not enough time to say everything that needs to be said. It's one of the biggest challenges for any preacher, for those who never preached, it's one of the biggest challenges for any preacher, is to stick to the time.

And as you know, I'm not always good at that. And so the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah, and of David, and Samuel, and the prophets. Now if I had the time, I could take a whole lesson on each of these guys, maybe more.

I mean some of these men, like David and Samuel, deserve months of examination and of teaching. And so I'm going to take my cue from the book and say, we're just going to mention these names. You need to go back and study them for yourself.

See how that faith worked in the lives of these men. Now one of the things that I'm just going to touch on in looking at these men, and I looked at these examples as I was preparing, and that is that all of them were, or let me say this, none of them were perfect in their faith. In other words, all of them had times of doubt.

All of them had fears, just like we do. None of them were a hundred percent filled with faith from the beginning to the end. You just need to read the Psalms about David, and see the times when he's crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He's speaking prophetically of Jesus, but he's speaking about his own state of mind at that particular point.

And so David goes through these times when he thinks that, feels that God's left him, when in fact God had not left him. And so faith in these men, even though they are heroes of faith, was not a perfect science. Gideon was hiding threshing wheat in a wine press, so that he couldn't be seen.

He didn't want to go to war, and yet when God called him, he goes. And Samson, we know his story, how that he failed so miserably over, and over, and over, and over, and yet when the crunch came at the very end, he understood what God had called him to. And he, in his blindness, and said that he had to be blinded physically in order to see things spiritually, to understand fully what God had called him to, and to understand the power of God in a real way.

And then in those final moments he embraces those pillars, and he kills more Philistines in his death than he killed in his life. And so we can go through each one of these men, men who were just like you and I, who had the same fears, the same doubts, the same discouragements, and yet in the end faith prevailed. Verse 33.

Here's a list, and again we can analyze this list. There are nine things mentioned, and they apparently are in three groups of three. I'm not going to get into that, because I want for us to get the message.

What I see in these final verses, as we come to the end of chapter 11, is a summing up of the rest of the chapter. Now I don't know how long we've been in Hebrews 11, but it's been a long time, it's been many months. But we now come to a summation of all of these things, and I trust that this morning, as we go home, we will get the two main points that come out of the rest of the of the book.

And so, who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Now it doesn't mean that these men that he's just mentioned were the ones who did all these things. And at the same time, all of these things that he mentions in these two verses are not recorded in Scripture.

Some of them are, and some of them are not. And I'll maybe highlight one or two as we as we go through. And so again, you can go through the Scripture, and this would be a good exercise, this would be good homework, for you to go through these verses and say, well, who through faith subdued kingdoms? Well that's an easy one.

Just think of all of the generals of Israel, all of the leaders of Israel, who conquered enemy nations. Now obviously we're saying this in the understanding that it was good versus evil. I don't want to get into that any further.

That's a particularly easy one. Who worked righteousness? Again, there are many, many examples of those. David, who set up a righteous kingdom.

Hezekiah, who came later on and ruled with righteousness. They obtained promises. They stopped the mouths of lions.

And of course, here we can think of Jephthah, I think it was, of David, who took the lion by its beard and and killed it when it attacked the sheep. And of course, particularly of Daniel, who was thrown into the lion's den and the lion's mouth was stopped. And so we can we can find men who, or people, who apply, to whom these apply.

But not all of them are true. Quenched the violence of fire. Well of course, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Escaped the edge of the sword. Again, there are many, many examples. Out of weakness were made strong.

Again, many examples. Became valiant in battle. Many examples.

Think particularly of David's heroes, David's braves, who defended him and fought with him through those many years, as David was fleeing before Saul and even later on. Turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.

Two women under Elijah and Elisha raised their children. Now we can try and find which of these men this all applied to. The fact is that these are just general things that faith caused them to conquer in, to be victorious, to be successful.

One of the most important things we need to take away here this morning is that there are two sides to our faith. There are two sides. There is the victorious side and there is the suffering side.

Two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately for many people in modern Christianity, verse 35 and 40 do not exist in their Bibles, because we've been seduced into believing that faith always results in success. That faith always results in the things that we've just looked at.

We subdue kingdoms, we work righteousness, obtain promises, stop the mouths of lions, quench the violence of fire. This victory is always promised to those who are of faith. That is not a biblical understanding of faith.

It is a false message, which has not just come from the prosperity gospel, but has infiltrated all churches and all Christians thinking today, including ours. Because when things start going wrong, and when things don't work out, we say, oh there's a problem here. No, there is not necessarily a problem.

When someone is not successful, either in financial terms or in spiritual terms, when Christian leaders are embattled as they are today, and I'm going to come back to that in in a few moments, we've spoken about this before, churches are dividing, churches are closing down all over the world, and people are looking at those pastors and at those elders, and they're saying these guys have failed. That is rubbish, because faith does not only give victory and success. Faith allows us to endure in times of failure, in times of hardship, in times of pain and suffering, in times of financial deprivation, in times of spiritual valleys.

Faith endures in those situations. If you only believe the first side of the coin, you will not survive hard times, because the question immediately is, something has gone wrong, God has forsaken me, my faith doesn't work. And so he reminds us of the fact that, and I want you to notice that it's in the middle of the verse and in the middle of the thought, he says, women received their dead raised to life, others were tortured.

What a contrast. Raising the dead has to be the most powerful thing outside of salvation in this world. How do you raise the dead? I don't remember if I shared with you, but when I was very new in the ministry, I think I was 20 years old, and I was called along with the elders to the bedside of a, I think he was three years old, little boy who got ridden over.

I actually saw it happen. They rushed him to the hospital, we got there, and it was one of the most life-changing things in my life and my ministry, as I watched this little boy die. I can remember still the doctors running around frantically, doing injections, IVs, shock, whatever you call the fancy thing, trying to keep him alive, but nothing, all of our technology, all of our science, could not keep life in that little boy.

As you watched him over about a couple of hours, life just fade away, and yet these people received their dead restored to life. That is the most powerful force in this world, and yet immediately he says, but others were tortured. So if faith must result in success, if faith must result in healing, and in victory, and in resurrection, then you have to discard the rest of this verse and the subsequent verses.

So yes, faith is powerful, faith gives victory, faith raises the dead, but faith also enables us to endure torture. I may have shared with you that I really struggle to read about the martyrs. I struggle because I can't imagine the pain, the suffering, blows my mind, and yet these men were tortured, not just in the Old Testament, remember there are those, and we're speaking about missions this morning, there are those who have been tortured right now in various parts of the world for their faith.

Physical, psychological, mental torture of the extreme kind, and yet they are not failures. You see, because the modern message of faith teaches us that if you don't have the victory, if you're not successful, if you're not flying above your circumstances, then you don't have faith. No, it takes more faith to endure torture than to raise the dead.

Think about it, not accepting deliverance. Everyone who's tortured for their faith can escape that torture by recanting, by denying the faith, and yet we know the two heroes died confessing Jesus. And so they were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection, the resurrection of the victorious.

You see, because here's the point, here's one of the points that we've made all along, and that's why I say these are a summation of the chapter. They see beyond the torture, and they see the resurrection. Faith sees beyond today.

Remember Abraham. Jesus said, Abraham saw my day, and he rejoiced. 2,000 years, Abraham looked into the future.

Remember we spoke about Moses. Moses looks thousands of years into the future, and he says, I accept the sufferings of Christ, rather than the passing pleasures of sin, for a moment. These men were able to look into the future and say, it's not about today, it's about eternity.

How do these men endure torture? By having their eyes fixed on the resurrection. We're going to see this in chapter 12, because chapter 12 is now going to switch over and begin to speak about how do we live in hardship and in difficulty. Let me just remind you, therefore we also, since we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin, looking to Jesus.

Verse 3, consider him who endured hostility from sinners against yourself. Then he speaks about, don't be discouraged when you're chastened by the Lord. So he's now going to speak about the practicalities of

living in the midst of hardship, in the midst of difficulty.

And so they did not accept deliverance because they looked to the resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings, and scourgings, and of chains, and of imprisonment. Now remember I said to you that not all of these can be connected to specific names in the Old Testament.

I think the issue of trials and mockings was something which was, that happened, but there's no specific prophet that I can remember that was actually mentioned in the Old Testament that endured that. Maybe the writer is referring to Peter. Remember Peter and the Apostles were scourged for the faith.

Maybe Paul, because he's writing a little bit past Paul's time, near the end of Paul's time, and of chains, and of imprisonment. Folk, let me remind you these men are not failures. These men are heroes.

It's easy to look down on others when they're suffering, either emotionally, or financially, or physically, whatever way, and say, pity he can't get above, rise above his circumstances. It depends on how they're bearing it. And if they're living by faith, then they are successful.

They will receive the commendation of the Father. Folk, I think that we need to be reminded again of Jesus. And remember that Paul says that the preaching of Jesus is foolishness.

And why does he use that word foolishness when he speaks about the Greeks? Because Jesus died a failure. He died on the cross like a criminal. His disciples all ran from him, except John and a few women.

And you want to tell us you need to follow this Jesus, who ended up in shame on a cross, and yet that was God's greatest victory. Same thing applies to Paul. Paul comes to the end of his life, and he says, I have nobody.

I just have Timothy. All seek their own. All have their own agenda.

But I have one man. And folk, I find that such an encouragement. And I pray that the day that I die, I'll have one man who I can say truly has got the message, has understood what this is all about.

They were stoned. They were sown into. Again, there's no example.

There are other writings that refer to Jeremiah who may have been sown into, but it's not in the Bible. They were tempted. They were slain with a sword.

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Again, this is a—to the modern Christian, this is a picture of a bunch of losers. I mean, they're running for their lives.

They're slain with a sword. They're wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins. They can't even afford a Ross suit, never mind an Armani suit.

As we're told, you should be able to wear if you were, if you're a victorious Christian. Being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Somehow we have gotten the message that when Christians are depressed, there's something wrong.

Now, I want to qualify that. If we're depressed for the wrong reasons, there's something wrong. But I want to remind you that blessed are those who mourn, Jesus says.

And why do they mourn? Not necessarily because they've been bereaved, but they mourn over the state of the world and the state of the church. It speaks of Jesus that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And I want to address some of this to the pastors who are listening this morning and to elders who are listening online.

Don't let people put pressure on you to always be laughing and joking and smiling, because that was not who Jesus was. Jesus wept for the sins of the world, for the unbelief that he saw around him. And these people, he says, they were destitute.

They were afflicted. They were tormented. I looked up that word destitute, because it's not a word we use often, and we tend to use it only in financial terms.

But the Greek word means, and I'm just going to read what Sayers, I think it was, said, to be left behind in the race and to fail to reach the goal. This is how the word is used throughout the New Testament. To fall short, to fail to become a partaker, to fall back from, to be inferior in power, influence, and rank, to fail, to be wanting, to be in want of lack, or to be in want of or lack, to be devoid of, to lack, to be inferior in excellence.

But these are all things that we despise. And we say, how can somebody be like that? And yet these were the men of faith. They were not esteemed.

They were not respected. The world didn't give them accolades and awards. The church, in the sense of Israel, didn't call them great heroes.

Remember, Jesus speaks about the prophets, and he speaks to Jerusalem, and he says, you who killed the prophets and stoned them. Now, folk, while this may apply to these men in the Old Testament, it applies in a very real way to many pastors that I know personally, and thousands of others that I know by statistics. And I want to say to them, you are not a failure.

Keep your eyes on Jesus. Persevere. Endure.

But this applies to us here this morning as well, because each one of us has times that when we go through difficulty, and there are some folk who seem to just, year after year after year, things just don't get better. Don't be discouraged, because that happened in the Old Testament, and it happened in the New Testament. And the only thing that matters is that you keep trusting the Lord.

That's the only thing that matters. The results are up to him. You see, that's the thing.

These guys had the same faith as the first part, the first list. In some cases, the faith resulted in miracles, resulted in great victories, and in other cases it resulted in endurance. But it's the same faith, and they will receive the same reward.

You see, when you read about great heroes of faith, and I love biographies. I read several a year. I've never read a Christian somewhere who his whole life struggled.

Struggled financially. Struggled with his relationships. Struggled emotionally, but he died never giving up.

I've never read that biography, and yet that's this biography here. Yeah, we'll read the biographies of men who did great things and preached to thousands, and hundreds got saved, and wrote hundreds of books, and did great and wonderful things, and went all over. That's great, but folks, that is not what our faith is all

about.

And in fact, that is not what the faith of the average Christian in the pew is all about. What it's about is enduring and trusting the Lord. I don't know how many books I've read on the book of Job, and how many expositors try to pin something on Job.

You know the story of Job. God took everything from him, and there's his friends, and they're saying, well, Job, you did something wrong. Job did nothing wrong, and Job comes to the conclusion, he says, the Lord has given, the Lord has taken.

I'll still worship him. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And then he says, even if he slays me, even if God kills me, I'll still trust him.

And that's the story of these people. Even if they had to die on the stake, or be pulled apart on the rack, they still trusted God. And folks, the devil will do everything he can to get us to take our eyes off Jesus, to get us to a place where we don't trust the Lord, and we say, well, maybe I'm just a bad person.

And we begin to believe the advice of those around us, and the books that you buy online, that try and tell you that if you're not victorious, there's something wrong with your faith. Don't let the devil sow that seed of doubt into your heart. Keep trusting him.

And you see, again, we've been taught that if you trust him enough, eventually the victory will come. No, the victory may never come in this life. I'll show that to you in a moment.

What about the guys who were tortured, and they didn't accept deliverance. They died. Was there victory for them? No, there was no victory in this life.

And the same with these guys who were sawn in two, tempted, slain with a sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented. There's no victory.

There was no better day. Tomorrow will be better. I've got bad news for you.

Tomorrow may not be better. I hope it will be. I hope sincerely for you and for me that tomorrow will be better.

But there's no guarantee. And if there is no better tomorrow, will we still trust him? Now it is of them of whom the world was not worthy. They were misfits, and the world was not worthy of them.

You see, we're so concerned about whether the world thinks we're good enough, we're worthy. That's not the point. If you're a true man or woman of faith, it's not whether you are worth it.

It's whether the world is worthy of your presence. And I'm not saying that in any arrogant sense, because you can see from these guys, there's no pride in them. It's all been beaten out of them.

They're as low as they can get, but in God's estimation, they're the great men. They're the heroes. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

They were pushed out of society. Now that may be true of many of them physically, but the tendency today would be for the true believer to be isolated emotionally and spiritually. Pushed out of the family, pushed out of general society, and even pushed out of the church.

They wandered in deserts and mountains, dens and caves. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promises. I'm almost through.

They did not receive the promises. Again, let me repeat myself, don't believe the message that if you don't get what you believe, that you don't have faith. Because these men did not receive the promises.

Even Abraham did not receive the promises, because what was the promise he saw? In your seed all nations will be blessed. When was that seed? That seed was Jesus. It wasn't in Isaac.

Abraham saw that city. Remember, we spoke about that. Thousands of years in the future, the new Jerusalem.

Abraham said, that's the promise. And he died thousands of years before the promise came real. These all, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promises.

It's simple. God's evaluation of your faith is not based on whether you get what you claim. It's based on faithfulness.

And so having obtained a good testimony, of who did they obtain the testimony? Because remember, we've just seen they were pushed out. Remember the prophets in the Old Testament. All the false prophets turned against them.

The king turns against them. The nations turned against them. They were out there on their own.

You remember there's Elijah, and he's in the cave, and he says, there's nobody. God reminds him, but there are others. The only testimony that matters is God's testimony.

It doesn't matter if the world, and it doesn't matter if the church, sees you as a failure. It doesn't matter if your family thinks you don't make the grade. It's what God says that matters.

He is the one who will testify on that day. You see, on that day, he's not going to call your family, the church, or the world to testify for or against you. There's going to be one witness, and that's going to be the books, and the Lord Jesus who will witness.

And so they obtained a good testimony. Folk, whether we get what we pray for or don't, whether people think that we're successful as a Christian, or as a citizen, or as a person, doesn't matter. It's God's approval that matters.

Last verse, God having provided something better for us. In other words, we in the New Testament have something more than they had. We've spoken about the various things that we have.

We have the Holy Spirit, we have the Word of God, we have the resurrection, we have the cross that we're able to look back to, we have all of these things that they didn't have in the Old Testament. But we have something more than that. We have the reality that they were only seeing the shadows and the types of.

Because at the end of the day, what is it all about? Well, the key is in the last, the second last sentence on the wall. Not be made perfect apart from us. Now, if you've been with us in the book of Hebrews, you remember this word perfect appears many times, especially in these last few chapters, 8, 9, 10.

How are we made perfect? Through the blood of Jesus. They could not be made perfect in the Old Testament because the blood had not yet been shed. They believed in anticipation.

I think a concept that we don't understand much, the older folk may understand, but we used to have a thing called a post-dated check. In other words, I don't have money in my bank right now, but I'll give you a check dated for next month. Next month you can take it to the bank.

Today? No, it's not going to work. They had a post-dated check. They didn't have the reality, but they had a promise that on that day Jesus would die, and three days later he would rise.

And they held on to that post-dated check to the day that it became a reality. We don't have a post-dated check, we have cash, because it's all real. It's all been accomplished for us at the cross of Calvary.

And then he says, God having provided something better for us, not a post-dated check but cash, that they should, and obviously I'm not talking about money, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Now that's a difficult part of the verse because you can easily interpret that in an arrogant way and say, well, if you are face value, they needed us. No, that's not what it's saying at all.

NIV, I think, does a little better job of translating this. Since God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Together with us.

And so they all waited for what we receive right now. Now let me remind you, those who were being tortured, those who were being sawn in two, those who wandered in deserts and caves, what were they looking for? Not acceptance, or fame, or fortune, or success. They were waiting for what we have received, the salvation of our souls.

You see, they got their priorities right. They said it doesn't matter if we live in caves, doesn't matter if we wear sheepskins, but we want to be clothed in the righteous robes that are washed in the blood of the Lamb. They got their priorities straight, and therefore they had their eyes fixed on the goal.

That's what Hebrews 12 is going to remind us of. Jesus endured because he had his eyes fixed on the joy that was set before him. So let me conclude by saying there's only the one thing that matters, and that is faith.

Interesting that James selected those choruses, those hymns this morning. Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus. Just trust him.

Just trust him. Now, I know just sounds easy. It's not that easy.

I understand that, but he's not asking you to perform miracles. He's not asking you to do great things. He's asking you to trust him.

That's all. Will you trust him today? And say, Lord, even if you don't heal me, even if you don't bless me financially, even if you don't fix my marriage, I'll still trust you because you are worthy, you're reliable, you're dependable, you're faithful, and may we resolve to die with that faith. Even if things never come right in your life, don't be discouraged.

Trust the Lord and endure to the end. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you, Lord, that you're not asking us to be what we cannot be, but you're asking us to trust you and to relieve the rest to you.

And, Lord, if you perform miracles for us, we'll rejoice in that and we'll give you thanks. And, Lord, if you don't perform miracles and if you don't rescue us from our circumstances, we'll still trust you. And, Lord, if things even get worse for us, help us to continue to trust you.

Lord, I pray that this may be real for us. Lord, that you'd forgive us for asking the question so many times, why me? Or just why? Lord, it doesn't matter. What we do know is you're true and you're faithful and you're just.

Help us to have our eyes fixed on you. Lord, whether we live in sunshine or in shadow, we will trust you. Help us, Lord, in our weak faith.

Thank you, Lord, that as we look at those men in the Old Testament, we know that none of them were perfect in their faith. Lord, we don't want to use that as an excuse to be unbelieving, but, Lord, at the same time, we want to be encouraged to put our confidence in you, even though we don't feel like it. Pray, Lord, that you'd continue to teach these things to us.

Make them real to us as we go from one another. We pray that you'd go with us, keep us, protect us, bring us together again safely on Thursday. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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