

Hebrews 11:35-40 "God Has Provided Something Better For Us"

Last week we ended with our writers' summation of how faith is worked out in the lives of God's people. He had spoken of those whose faith had demonstrated that they knew God and trusted in His promises. The list was certainly not exhaustive and included those we would expect to see and some we might not.

But as he came to the end of his thought he said in HEB 11:32-35 "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, ..."

These are great and mighty conquests and exploits of faith which no one could dispute as coming from God on behalf of His people. The faith of God's people was seen all throughout redemptive history as they looked to their Creator and God and submitted to Him as Lord and Savior.

Most of us would like to be identified as ones who achieve great accomplishments as we come against the enemy and tear down strongholds in the name of our Lord, as our faith trusts Him and stands firm to the end. Who wouldn't want to be identified with conquering kingdoms, shutting the mouths of lions, quenching the power of fire, escaping the edge of the sword and putting foreign armies to flight?

But we must understand that God does not always measure our faith in the victories we may possess in this world or in the great obstacles we overcome. There are teachings in today's Church that would suggest that God's people should never have a defeat under any circumstance. No Christian should ever get sick, or lose a business deal, or find difficulty in the financial end of our lives. No Christian should ever find themselves at the mercy, or lack thereof, of unbelievers to where they get the, seemingly, final word.

The idea follows that simply because we're Christians we are somehow untouchable from the curse of this world which was

brought on by sin; the curse introduced in the Garden of Eden where God promised man that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would surely die.

The whole universe has been affected by this curse of sin.

ROM 8:20-22 "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

We live in a sin-filled world and therefore even Christians are not exempt from its effects. If you question that then ask yourself how many Christians over the last 2,000 years have escaped death, the ultimate illness?

The apostle Paul himself, a great man of faith, says in GAL 4:13-14 "As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. 14 Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself."

In this case the Lord used the sickness of Paul to bring the gospel to the Galatians. In another instance a very close friend of Paul's, and brother in Christ, also became ill.

PHI 2:25-27 "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow."

The effects of sin in this world are numerous and we must never think that we are immune from them. But, for this very reason, our faith must be strong as we rely on our God for all things and acknowledge, with our obedience, that His grace is sufficient.

Andrew Murray sheds some light on this when he said, "Faith has a twofold victory. In one case, it conquers the enemy or the difficulty by securing its removal or destruction. In the other, there is no deliverance from the trouble, and yet faith conquers in the

power it receives to endure, and to prove that its spirit is superior to all that man and devils can do."

This brings us to our text which may appear as though God's people have been defeated when in fact our Lord uses these examples of great faith in Him. You see, simply because we may not be victorious or successful, as men measure success in a particular arena of faith, it does not necessarily mean that God's will is not accomplished as faith is engaged in God.

HEB 11:35-38 "Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."

This doesn't sound like an army you would volunteer to be a part of and yet these men and women, mentioned here as O.T. saints, had a faith, which in some instances, was greater than those who were on the receiving end of great victories.

We must be careful here not to think that these people were looking forward to their experiences of torture or imprisonment or persecution. What is important to understand is that in those times in history where God's people were called upon to endure such hardships God was there for them, to enable them to go through the time of difficulty.

And this is why these verses are really more of a testimony of God's grace, even as He enabled them to put their faith to practice under adverse conditions. But we cannot divorce the individuals' faith from the actual event. They believed, and they endured because they trusted that whatever could be taken away from them in this world could not be compared to what they would receive in the next world promised to them in Christ.

Paul understood this when he said in ROM 8:17-18 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs -heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

This is what we read in our text in verse 35.... "Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection."

Some have suggested that the O.T. saints were completely ignorant of the resurrection of the dead. And yet our writer tells us that they knew they would gain a better resurrection, which is in contrast to the resurrection which we see in the beginning of verse 35 where "women received back their dead by resurrection." In those cases the reference is to people who died and then came back to life, as in the case of Lazarus. But they all died again.

But there is a better resurrection, and this is what the O.T. saints looked forward to. This resurrection is the resurrection from the dead which Christ accomplished as He defeated sin and death. It is His resurrection we rejoice in, not only for our salvation, but as the first fruit of the kind of resurrection we will receive on the last day.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

In the book of Acts Peter explains how O.T. saints, such as David, understood this.

ACT 2:29-32 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ; that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."

On another occasion Paul shared his faith in the resurrection of the dead.

ACT 23:6-8 "Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)"

The Jews acknowledged that God had taught of the resurrection of all men. And our writer in Hebrews confirms that it was precisely

this truth that many of the O.T. saints looked to when their lives were threatened because of their faith in God and His promises.

They, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob looked to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God, but they also understood that their bodies would not be in the grave forever. God would raise them up and give them new bodies which would be glorified to live with Him forever.

This is the promise you and I have as well.

ROM 6:5 "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."

1CO 15:41-44 "The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. 42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

As the O.T. saints understood this, and as they hoped in God, they were able to persevere under terrible circumstances because they looked beyond the present and hoped in the future. Their faith had the "assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen." (Heb.11:1)

It's not normally a subject any of us like to talk about or wished we received, and yet suffering for the sake of Christ is something our Lord tells us to expect.

Paul understood this. After he was stoned and left for dead in Lystra he encouraged the disciples to go to Derbe to preach the gospel, and we read in ACT 14:21-22 "They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said."

They understood that putting your faith on the line may put you in harm's way at times. But it doesn't mean they were masochists. They simply knew that if it happened God would be there in the midst with them. His grace was always sufficient.

Peter also understood this when he wrote in 1PE 4:12-16 "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

Does this mean that all of us will be called upon to suffer for the name of Christ like these people in Heb.11:35-38? No, but it does mean that if it came down to that God would enable us to endure as we placed our faith in Him to be with us.

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But, what should also concern us are the comparatively smaller trials we all endure as Christians. Admittedly, when you're the one experiencing it, no trial seems small. But all trials are meant to give us an opportunity to grow in our faith and to glorify our Lord as we rely on Him.

This is what James says in his epistle:

JAM 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

The joy comes, not from the trial itself, but that through it all our faith will develop perseverance and perseverance will enable us to be that much more mature in our faith, so that we can be more effective for Christ in this world. That's a good thing.

The apostle Peter, who was killed for his faith, would agree.

1PE 1:6-7 "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

In the eyes of God, your faith in Him is something very special He wants to constantly build up and strengthen. With your faith

strong you will seek the Lord more often. With your faith strong you will love and serve the Lord with more vigor. With your faith strong you will be better equipped to be there for others when their faith is weak.

God takes your faith very seriously. And if he deems such fiery ordeals as a way to not only prove our faith genuine but to bring glory and honor to Christ then we should seek Him diligently so that we may have His strength to go forward.

This is what many of the O.T. saints understood. And yet, for many of them it was only the *hope* through faith, *the conviction* of things not seen, which they experienced. Because, as our text tells us in HEB 11:39, "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised."

Those who had great victories and those who were persecuted were all commended by God. In God's eyes none were greater than the others simply because their circumstances were different. It was their faith in their particular circumstance which is commended by God.

But, despite that, they still did not receive what was promised. In other words, they did not possess the promises which they looked forward to. The literal rendering of this phrase "none of them received what had been promised" is, "these all did not obtain "the" promise."

Arthur W. Pink says this: "Received not *the* promise." The singular number here implies some pre-eminent excellent thing promised, and this is Jesus Christ, the Divine Savior. He is said to be given according to the "promise" (Acts 13:23). God's "promise" was declared to be fulfilled when He brought Christ forth (Acts 13:32-33). In Acts 2:39 and 26:6 Christ is set forth under this term "promise."

..... Christ Himself is the prime promise, not only because He was the substance of the first promise given after the fall (Gen.3:15), but also because He is the complement or accomplishment of all the promises."

This is what Paul tells us in 2CO 1:20 "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."

All things were fulfilled in Christ. Our Lord tells us Himself in MAT 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

It is Jesus they longed for, as the ultimate fulfillment of their hope, which they possessed by faith. Yes, they did possess many of the promises. The promise of a land and an inheritance promised by Moses through God. Yes, they did possess the victories over their enemies. Yes, they did possess the blessings for faithfulness.

But, they did not possess "the" most important thing which they looked forward to at the time of their death; Jesus Christ, come in the flesh to redeem them from their sin. They did not receive the promise of the Incarnate Savior coming in their lifetime. They did not receive the promise of their resurrection from the dead. They received none of these things in this life.

There was something better to be received by future generations which these O.T. saints did not receive. That better thing which was promised would be realized by future generations of which you and I are a part.

This is also what this letter has been saying throughout. This is why this chapter on faith is so important for these Hebrew Christians to realize, as well as us. Our hope is not entirely one we look forward to as did the O.T. saints. We have realized the promise in Christ. And because of this we must live in the reality that our High Priest lives today on the other side of the grave through His resurrection.

What the O.T. saints only dreamed of through faith, as they hoped for this reality in their lifetimes, we have as a fulfillment. In fact, this is the way this whole letter starts. Remember?

HEB 1:1-3 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

The promise arrived in Christ and our sure foundation is one which should enable us to look to the promise and live each day in that promise of the hope of our salvation which has been realized. If

the O.T. saints could live faithfully having never seen the promise, how much more should we who know that Christ has come for us?

HEB 11:40 "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

That which was better was the fulfillment of the promises the O.T. saints had; the Son of God personally coming into this world to redeem us and secure our eternal inheritance. What makes it better is that it's no longer just a promise waiting to happen.

But the saints of old had to wait before their promise would be fulfilled even though they went to be with the Lord at their death. Christ still had to come and fulfill all things before sin would be actually and really dealt a death blow through the death and resurrection of Christ in time and history.

We've seen some great saints who loved the Lord, like Abel, Abraham, David, and others, and yet as great as they were in terms of standing for the Lord and being examples of faith, there is one infinitely better, who is our example. This is where our writer wants us to direct our attention.

This is why it says there in our text, "so that only together with us would they (O.T. saints) be made perfect." That word perfect in the Greek is *teleioo* and it means to complete, [(i.e. (lit.) accomplish, or (fig.) consummate (in character)]. Their hope would not be completed or consummated until Christ came into this world to redeem mankind.

Now that He has come, both we and those of old, share in the hope of not only having our sins forgiven but also the hope of all future promises concerning Christ and His Kingdom. But you know there is a very real sense in which both they and we will be perfected together in the unity of the Spirit.

1TH 4:13-18 "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still

alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words."

We'll all be caught up together "and so we will be with the Lord forever."

You and I, together with the O.T. saints, still have future promises in Christ. We do not fully possess the entirety of our inheritance. We do not yet serve the Lord face to face in glorified bodies. But, all of those promises are secured by the victory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has vanquished Satan.

1JO 3:8 "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."

You and I in Christ no longer come under the dominion or power of Satan because Christ Jesus has condemned sin in the flesh and given us His victory through His resurrection. We belong to Him and we are empowered to live by faith as He has given us His Spirit. Praise God that He has given us something better.

Life instead of death. Hope instead of despair. Himself instead of Satan and judgment. He has perfected us in His righteousness and is perfecting us in the power of the Spirit to go out into this world and bring the message of hope to all people.

ROM 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through *faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by *faith* into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the *hope* of the glory of God."

ROM 15:4-6 "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."