

WITH FAITH, WE WIN **(Hebrews 11:32-40)**

I remember being told when I was young, “It doesn’t matter whether you win or lose; it’s how you play the game.”

You know what, I didn’t believe that statement then, and I still don’t. Yes, we want to compete in accordance with the rules. Yes, we want to play with integrity. Yes, sportsmanship is important. All of that is true. There is, however, no substitute for victory. There are times when it really does matter whether or not we win.

- In business it matters who wins the sale or the contract.
- In politics it matters who wins vote or the election.
- In athletics it matters to a lot of people who wins the game or the championship.
- In love it matters who wins the girl or the guy.
- In military conflict it matters who wins the battle or the war.

There is no substitute for victory.

One of my favorite commercials was the Progressive Insurance commercial where Flo, the sales expert, seeks to comfort the newbie salesperson who has just botched a sale. She says, “Let’s go get some ice cream.”

His eyes brighten, and he asks hopefully, “With sprinkles?”

She replies matter-of-factly, “No, sprinkles are for winners.”

If sprinkles are on the line, it matters whether or not we win.

The Bible talks about victory. In Romans we are said to be more than conquerors. The letter of 1 John uses the Greek word *nike* (victory) once and the verb form *nikao* (overcome or gain victory) six times. It is used 28 times in the NT. God wants us to be overcomers and victors.

Hebrews 11 tells us the secret to victory. It gives us that one indispensable ingredient that goes into becoming a victor. To win the victory, regardless of the area of conflict, we have to employ faith. The victory goes not to the smartest or the most talented or the most experienced. Victory goes to the one who takes God at His word. Simply defined, “Faith is taking God at His word.”

Maybe you have heard the saying, “God said it; I believe it; that settles it.” What settles it is that God said it. Period. Whether you or I believe it to be so or not has no bearing whatsoever on it being so. What matters, and the only thing that matters, is the fact that God said it.

While what God says is true regardless of whether or not we believe it to be so, we must believe God in order to enjoy the victory God has for His people. It is believers and only believers who are the true winners.

In Hebrews 11 we find the story of those OT saints—those heroes and heroines—who took God at His word. Because they did, they were victorious in His eyes.

Today, we come to the last nine verses of Hebrews 11. We are going to look at 11:32-40. Our title is, “With Faith, We Win.” There are three truths that emerge from our text

about those with winning faith.

With Faith, We Might Accomplish the Spectacular

Let's read vv. 32-35a. The author mentions six people by name. God used Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel in remarkable, spectacular ways. The first four men show up in the Book of Judges

What did God do through **Gideon**? In Judges 7 we find the story. The Midianite and Amalekite armies are compared to "locusts in abundance." Their camels were said to be without number, like grains of sand on the seashore.

How many men did Gideon take to battle that huge army? (300) What weapons did he take? (a trumpet, a clay jar, and a little torch hidden inside the jar). Yet, with that small army and those odd weapons, Gideon's forces won a great victory.

Judges 4-5 tells the story of **Barak** who with a force of 10,000 men defeated the much larger forces led by Sisera who had 900 chariots of iron. The author of Judges wrote, ". . . and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left" (4:16).

Time will not permit us to go into all the exploits of the one called **Samson**. One man wrote, "We are inclined to judge Samson by his weaknesses. But God commends him for his faith." It is ironic that it was only after Samson was physically blinded by his captors that he gained spiritual perspective. At the end we find him doing something that we never saw him do before—he prayed to God. He looked to God for help, and God gave it.

Judges 11 tells how God used **Jephthah** to defeat the Ammonites.

David was victorious countless times, but what was his first great victory? He slew Goliath. Did he go against Goliath because he thought he was a superior soldier? No. He was still a youth when the two faced one another. David fought Goliath believing that God would give him the victory. And God did.

The previously mentioned individuals were warriors, but **Samuel** was a prophet. Still yet, he fought against idolatry and immorality. His opponents were not Philistines; they were his own people. His faith was seen in his obedience to say and do what God said.

Some people found in Hebrews 11 are mentioned not by name but by what they did. Who was it that stopped the mouths of lions? (**Daniel**) Who quenched the power of fire? (**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**) Who in the OT was used by God so that women would receive back their dead? (**Elijah** brought back to life the child of a widow in 1 Kings 17. **Elisha** raised the son of a Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4).

All these spectacular things were done by faith. The same holds true for today. Consider what Jesus said in John 14:12. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."

This is an amazing promise. Jesus did some amazing things, and yet He says that we will do even greater works. This verse tells us what makes this possible. (Jesus is going to the Father). He tells us who it is that will be doing these great things. (Those who believe). What He doesn't tell us is what these great things are.

What are some of the great things Jesus did? Jesus healed bodies. He even raised

bodies. Eventually, however, these same bodies, that Jesus once healed got sick and died. I'm wondering, where were all the people Jesus healed and fed when He was nailed to the cross. They didn't riot. They didn't try to rescue Him. Where were they?

In the weeks, months, and years after Jesus was raised, His disciples went out preaching the good news, and thousands were saved. Those who were saved were willing to be martyred. They were willing to give their lives for Jesus' sake.

Changing a heart is a greater work than healing a body. The former is permanent while the latter is just temporary.

Are you willing to let God use you to change the lives and hearts of others by telling them the good news of Jesus? That will take faith.

With faith, you and I just might accomplish the spectacular.

Now, let's imagine for a moment that the author of Hebrews had preached his letter to a congregation. The entire text of this letter was his sermon. Let's suppose that we are listening to him preach. He gets to the passage we read today. He begins to describe the exploits of those who were victorious by faith:

- who through faith conquered kingdoms and enforced justice (Praise the Lord!)
- obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions (That's right!)
- quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword (Hallelujah!)
- were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight (Preach it, brother!)
- Women received back their dead by resurrection (Glory to God!)
- Some were tortured . . . Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment (Other than the sound of crickets, there is complete silence)
- They were stoned [and not with drugs but by rocks], they were sawn in two, and they were killed with the sword (People are looking at one another. It is obvious the preacher has gone off the rails, but the preacher continues).
- They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy (The people shrug their shoulders and wonder, "What's gone wrong with the preacher?")

Here's what I want you to understand . . .

With Faith, We Can Persevere Through the Horrific

The author of Hebrews changes his tune dramatically when he comes to vv. 35b-38. Just as it takes faith to do great things, it takes faith to persevere through bad things. Staying true to God while all hell breaks loose is no less victorious than doing great deeds.

John MacArthur wrote, "It often takes more courage to hold on than to fight on, and where there is need for more courage, there is need for more faith."

Look at what the saints of the OT endured.

Again, MacArthur wrote, "Here is the pinnacle of faith, willingness to accept the

worst the world has to offer—death—because of trust in the best God has to offer—resurrection.”

Do we, on this side of the resurrection, ever have to endure difficult times? Absolutely. I’ve never heard a wealth and health preacher preach on Hebrews 11:35-38. Do you remember what Paul said his goal was? “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead.”

What do you have to experience first before you can experience resurrection? (death)

Charles Spurgeon said, “There will be no crown wearers in heaven who were not cross bearers on earth.” In Jesus’ day, a cross was not a piece of jewelry worn about the neck. Instead, it was an instrument of execution to which you were nailed.

Consider what Peter wrote. Look at 1 Peter 4:12-19.

I am reminded of the story of St. Teresa of Avila. She lived in Spain during the 16th century. She became a nun and spent much time in prayer and contemplation. Later in her life she set up numerous convents. Teresa endured much opposition and experienced much suffering in her life. As she contemplated these things, she felt God saying to her, “This is how I deal with My friends.” With good humor, Teresa replied to God, “That must be why You have so few friends.”

Back in 2015, before I moved to Enid, every now and then I would work in Enid. One day, while here, I met a friend of God who lives in Enid. His name is Jeremy. Some years before, he joined the Army. He said he graduated from Delta Force training on the day the Twin Towers fell in NYC on 9/11. He said that on that day he and his comrades grabbed their guns, and they were ready to go wherever they were sent.

In 2003, while on duty in Iraq, the vehicle he was in hit an IED. He literally died in the explosion. God used a medic to bring him back to life, but he barely hung on. Numerous bones throughout his body were broken. He sustained a traumatic brain injury. He underwent extensive brain surgery. A large portion of his brain on the left side is gone. His right hand is not useable. He walks with a noticeable limp.

Despite his limitations, Jeremy is a bright young man.

During our conversation, I asked Jeremy, “Are you a person of faith? I notice that you are wearing a cross on your t-shirt, and you have piece of artwork over there that says, ‘Jesus Freak.’ Are you a believer?”

Jeremy smiled and answered, “How can I not be? He brought me back to life.”

Jeremy has undergone more trials and suffering than you and I can imagine, but he has persevered, and he has a victorious faith.

Do you share such a victorious faith? Are you persevering in the midst of difficult, trying circumstances?

So far, we have seen that **with faith we might accomplish the spectacular**. Also, **with faith may can persevere through the horrific**. Finally . . .

With Faith, We Will Participate in the Glorious

Look at 11:39-40. When we read v. 39, we are taken back to v. 2 of this chapter. All

of those mentioned in this chapter were commended because of their faith. In other words, they were approved by God.

Have you ever bought a piece of clothing, and when you got it home, you found a tag that read, “Inspected by #14.” That tells you that before that pair of pants left the factory, someone, in this case Inspector #14, carefully examined that piece of clothing that now belongs to you. She saw that the pockets had been sewn on, the zipper worked, the button was accounted for, the left leg wasn’t shorter than the right leg. In fact, the waist and length had been sized correctly. The pants had been inspected and approved for sale.

In like manner, God inspects us. He watches us go through trials. “Oh, I like the way she perseveres through suffering. I like the way he doesn’t strike back when he has been mistreated.” He sees that we bear the marks and traits of a person who has authentic faith, and He gives us His stamp of approval.

Verse 39 tells us what these men and women of faith in the OT had and what they did not have. They had God’s approval, but there was something they did not receive. They did not receive what was promised. According to v. 33, they had obtained some of the promises of God. But there was one particular promise that had been withheld.

Verse 40 tells why this promise was that had been withheld. It was so that “apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

So, what was this something that was postponed? It was not so much a something as it was a someone, not so much a *what* as it was a *who*. Look all the way back to a promise that God made to Adam and Eve after they had rebelled against Him by eating the forbidden fruit. Despite their grievous sin against God, in His grace, God gave them a promise. Oddly, God spoke to the serpent, but Adam and Eve were listening. Consider Genesis 3:15 from the NLT: “From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike His heal.”

This has been called the first messianic prophecy. This is the gospel, the good news of Jesus, that was promised all the way back in Garden of Eden. A Deliverer will come who will win the victory over mankind’s enemy. Satan is the enemy, and Jesus is the Deliverer.

Throughout the OT, God’s people had been promised a Messiah, a Deliverer. Although they had been the recipients of numerous promises God had made, this one promise had not yet been realized. Moses had been a deliverer, but he wasn’t the fulfillment of this great promise. The judges had been deliverers from those who oppressed God’s people, but none of them were the ultimate fulfillment. Godly Kings, such as David, had been deliverers, but none of them qualified as the Deliverer.

That promise was not realized and fulfilled until Jesus came. Now, we New Testament believers together with the OT saints are being made perfect through Jesus.

Have you ever found yourself in a position where you did not receive what was promised? How does that make you feel when a person or a company or a politician doesn’t deliver on the promises that are made?

The One spoken of here isn’t just anybody. This is God. What was the promise that was made? The word *promised* in v. 39 is in the singular. It is referring to Jesus, to the

Messiah. The OT saints lived their lives looking for the Messiah, and He never came during their lifetime.

It wasn't until Jesus came, died, and rose again that the promise given to the OT saints was fulfilled. Their faith looked forward to the coming of the Savior. Our faith looks backward. They looked to a future event, while we look back to an historical fact.

But there is a sense in which what was promised to them and to us has not been completely fulfilled. We have not been made perfect yet. What are we still awaiting? We are awaiting the return of Jesus. That is when our salvation will be complete.

Verse 40 uses a word that has become familiar in this letter. In Hebrews, the author mentions better things, a better hope, a better covenant, better promises, better sacrifices, a better possession, a better country, and a better life. Finally, in this last verse of Hebrews 11, God has provided as something better, and as we said earlier, it is not something but Someone.

Jesus is better. Jesus is better than whatever the world offers you. Jesus is better than that worldly lifestyle you are living. Jesus is better than that earthly goal you are striving to achieve. Your target may be good. Your dream may be good. What you are hoping to obtain or achieve may be good. Just remember, Jesus is better. Jesus is superior. Don't make the mistake of sacrificing your relationship with Him on the altar of the good.

When I was a young pastor, I remember reading a book written by Pastor Martin Thielen. In his book he mentioned that one of the members of his congregation had been diagnosed with cancer. He went to see her. During the course of their conversation, she said, "I don't want to die; I want to live," but she went on to make a wise and significant observation. She said, "Either way, live or die, with faith you win."

That is what I want you to remember: Live or die, good or bad, with faith you win. There is no substitute for a faith that wins.