

Faith: Learning to Trust God Like Our Heroes (Hebrews 11)

Sermon Notes for Message #11: The Rewards of Faith (11:32-12:3) – Pastor Jeff

- This study on faith (from Hebrews 11) has taught us much about having a confident trust in whatever God says is true and applying it regardless of the circumstance or consequence. We have seen that God works through ordinary flawed people to say and do extraordinary things just because God's gift of faith is enabled to fully depend on Him.
- There is much more the writer could say about faith and its personification (v. 32: *"and what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of..."*), but he wanted to strengthen the church and bring this faith-building message to a crescendo by seeing its worthiness.
- So, what is the reward of faith? It is simply the fact that trusting God always works to honor God and leads to His ultimate reward (Jer. 17:7; Rom. 9:33). Let's notice four rewards God provides even in the midst of sorrow, persecution and death.

① Faith is rewarded with supernatural interventions (11:32-35a)

- God is by far the best rewarder and He always honors faith and sometimes with astonishing results (notice the words *"conquered, performs, obtained, shut, quenched, escaped, made strong, became mighty, put armies to flight, received back"*).
- We can learn two lessons about faith and God's intervention:
 - Faith empowers flawed people to do great things for God. The writer randomly lists seven flawed examples of people God blessed by supernatural means during difficult situations.
 - Faith enables great things that only God's ability can describe. We can tend to think our intellect, skill, strength, education, money or other capabilities cause an achievement when God reminds us He is behind every success (Prov. 16:9; 1 Cor. 3:6; Prov. 21:31; Deut. 8:18; Jam. 1:5). The list of amazing results is clearly beyond man's capability (Jn. 15:5; 2 Cor. 7:7).

② Faith is rewarded with special recognition (Heb. 11:32b-38)

- God moves from the spectacular (results) to the vicious and brutal atrocities that come against those of faith. Not only can God bless faith with supernatural interventions, but He also blesses faith with the grace to endure unthinkable mistreatment.
- The list of atrocities is horrific (v. 35b-37) and it reminds us of the brutal opposition of Satan towards God's people and the savage and evil indignities the wicked are willing to perpetrate on people of faith. This should encourage us to endure all the abuse that comes our way since we have a great company of faith-walkers who went before us *"of whom the world is not worthy"* (v. 38).
 - Are you and I willing to suffer for Christ's sake? (Acts 14:22)
 - Do we demean His name by believing God wants us all to be healthy and rich in this life?

③ Faith is rewarded with superior provision (11:39-40)

- God has provided so much to fuel of faith (His Presence-Heb. 13:5; His power-Col. 1:29; His total pardon-1 Jn. 1:7; His promises-Heb 6:19), but the Hebrews writer points to two superior provisions.
- God's personal approval is a superior provision of faith. Faith brings God's "approval" (v. 2, 39). Our faith in the Lord demonstrates a commendable testimony of God's blessing (Ps. 40:4).
- God's preeminent assurance is a superior provision of faith (v. 40: "God has provided something better for us"). Those before Christ (in the Old Covenant) "did not receive what was promised" (Christ and the New Covenant – Heb 10:10). While those before Christ saw Him from a distance in types, prophesies, and shadows, we have seen Him revealed in the New Testament and are experiencing New Covenant spiritual blessings.
 - Why eat the cheese and crackers of the faith when you can enjoy the banquet of His grace?
 - Why get along with the good when you can have the best (Rom. 10:12; 4:17)?
 - Why ride third-class when Christ has bought and paid for a first-class ticket?

④ Faith is rewarded with supreme motivation (12:1-3)

- We are all motivated by many things intrinsically and extrinsically, but what the Hebrews writer points to ultimately and supremely is the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Four motivations are mentioned that should keep inspiring us to "run" the race of faith:
 - 1) Run with the right encouragement (v. 1a: "cloud of witnesses" who ran the race of faith before us and won)
 - 2) Run with the right elimination (v. 1b: "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us"). Get rid of anything (not necessarily sinful) that weighs you down and get rid of the sin of doubt or unbelief ("the sin that so easily entangles us")
 - 3) Run with the right endurance (v. 1:c: "let us run with endurance"). The race of faith isn't a picnic or vacation cruise, but full of hardships and opposition that needs a joyful patience that refuses to be derailed, detoured or defiled by sin, Satan or the flesh.
 - 4) Run with the right example (v. 2-3). We must fix "our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith". Our faith is not in a creed or a code of behavior or a cause or the church, but in Christ alone!