

Swimming Upstream: When God's Way is the Hard Way

Part 4 - Choosing to live God's way

Definition of Faith

Hebrews 11:1-2

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation.

- Faith is the value that people are evaluated on throughout scripture.
- Those who are portrayed as good showed much faith, those that are shown to be bad show little faith.
- This chapter is a "Hall of Fame" of people who showed much faith despite their circumstances.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- It's impossible to please God without faith.
- God is not pleased in our actions alone, God is pleased when we put our faith into action.
- When we choose God over other things He is glorified in that decision.
- "Rewards those who seek him" - God rewards those who choose to live His way:
 - Daniel and the king's food, Jewish boys success as advisors, Daniel's promotion by king Darius, etc.

Examples of Faith pt. 1

Hebrews 11:32-35a

32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection.

- Numerous examples of faith.
- God moved mightily in response to the faith of OT heroes.
- These chose God's way despite difficult circumstances.
- "quenched the power of fire" - The fiery furnace - "won't bow down to idols"
- "stopped the mouths of lions" - The lion's den - "won't be formed by feelings"

Examples of Faith pt. 2

Hebrews 11:35b-38

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

- Still more examples of faith
- These are commended for their faith despite the physical outcome.
- These chose God's way despite difficult outcomes.
- Following God may (physically) end badly for you.
- "The world was not worthy" - their proclamation of the word of God to sinful people who would harm them was a greater privilege than people deserved.

Now What...?

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

- “Lay aside every weight” - “hold fast to what is true”
- “Lay aside sin that clings closely” - “stand strong and worship”
- In light of the previous examples of faith, and especially in light of Jesus’ own model of endurance in faith, believers are called to endure as runners in a race.
- “Christ be Magnified”

Small group questions

- In your own words what does it look like to live God's way?
- Do you think it is better to live God way or your own way? Why or why not?
- What are some examples of things that are contrary to God's law but are acceptable and/or encouraged in our culture?
- For you, when is it hardest to choose to live God's way?
- Why do you think scripture evaluates people based on their faith?
- Why is it important to remember examples where God delivered people from difficult circumstances in response to their faith?
- Why is it important to remember examples where people suffered difficult outcomes for taking a stance for their faith?
- What does it look like today, in your school, family, etc. for you to live out your faith?
- How do you think God rewards Christians for their faith today?
- For you, what might it cost to choose to live God's way?
- How might God miraculously deliver Christians who are suffering for their faith today?
 - What does it change or matter if He doesn't deliver them?