

Hebrews 11:32-40, “Victorious Faith”

8.4.19

One of the questions I get the most as a pastor is this one: “Why do good people...people who are truly and earnestly living for Jesus...why do they suffer? Doesn’t God care?” Have you been asked that question before? Have you thought of that question lately? Why do good people suffer?

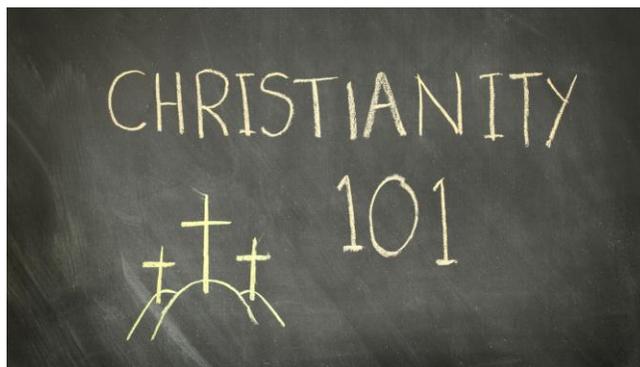
Over the last 9 weeks we’ve been studying Hebrews chapter 11 and we’ve seen heroes of the faith who have won tremendous victories. Think of Noah being saved on the ark. Abraham being given his son back on Moriah. Moses delivering the nation of Israel out of the hands of Egypt and Pharaoh. And last week...Joshua and the nation of Israel-victorious over Jericho, and prostitute...an inhabitant of Jericho named Rahab, who survived the destruction because of faith...ALL VICTORIES!

But, what about when we don’t win? What about when we lose? What about when we suffer? What about then? Well, be encouraged Church Family, that’s what we’re going to talk about today. We’re going to talk about “Victorious Faith, Even in Suffering.”

Hebrews 11:32-40

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. 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,^[a] 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. ³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Today we conclude our series, “The Power of Faith.” Next week, we’re going to begin a new series that we’re calling:



We’re going to spend the next 8-weeks moving through Hebrews chapter 12 and 13 and we’ll see the basic, elementary principles of what it means to be a Christian. We’re going to see how to grow in our faith and what the keys to a successful Christian life really are...and we’ll see how we can have joy in the journey as we get back to the basics. So, I hope you’ll make plans to be with us over the next several weeks... But for today, I want to us to see what the Lord has for us as we finish our Faith Series.

I must tell you, I'm a bit like the Apostle Paul...there is so much more that we could say and talk about regarding faith...and the heroes of the faith, and that was his sentiment in verse 32. I, too, am like Paul...our time is limited...he said as much in verse 32...see it again...

Hebrews 11:32

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—

Now before we briefly look at these men's lives...let's think about who Paul is talking to... Hebrews...it's the book of Hebrews...these are Jews who have surrendered their lives to Christ. Yes, there's still some on the fence, who haven't surrendered, but primarily the audience is former Jews, turned Christians. Therefore, they know these names like the back of their hand. It's part of their heritage and history. What Paul has been trying to do is to remind the people that what God has desired all along is a relationship of faith and trust. That's why we have read over and over in this chapter this phrase, "by faith, by faith, by faith." We have a relationship with the Lord BY FAITH.

And that's the point of the not only this Hall of Faith chapter, in chapter 11, but the entire book of Hebrews. It's to remind the people...hey folks we have left Judaism and the old ways, for the new way...the way found only through Jesus Christ and His blood...not the blood of bulls and goats and lambs...not through a Priest...not a Temple...but, through a Savior, who gave His life for you.

So, Paul is going to finish the list... He's going to finish the walk down the Hall of Faith and he quickens the pace. As we just read in verse 32, he gives the names of Judges, Kings and Prophets: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel. In one fell swoop, we move from the book of Joshua (last week) all the way through the book of Judges clear through the prophets, which takes us to the end of the Old Testament. And so now, let's hit some highlights about these men that I think will encourage us.

First, there's Gideon. We have men in our midst who are "Gideons." You know the Gideons...we see their bibles throughout the world from hotel rooms to hospitals... Gideon was considered a great man of faith, even though he doubted God. Remember, he kept throwing out a fleece...a skin of a lamb and asking God to wet it and then dry it to prove that he was take the Israelite army into battle. I've said this over and over and we saw again last week with Rahab...who thought she had to lie to get God's will accomplished...I'm glad that we don't have to have perfect faith...I'm glad we don't have to have a ton of faith...I'm glad that we have to have faith, like the grain of a mustard seed!

How about Barak...he was actually a coward and wouldn't go fight, as God directed, unless Deborah the Prophetess went with him. Samson...the man with the long hair...what a train wreck he was.



He was literally led around by the hair by a wicked woman named Delilah! Yet, in the end, Samson trusted God to help him destroy the enemy. And get this, (vs 32) Jephthah was born out of wedlock and his family drove him off...and yet, God used Jephthah to deliver the Israelites from the Ammonites. And so you see yet again, how God can use anybody for His work! And that includes you and me...

Think about David...we think of him slaying Goliath...



and what an amazing feat that was with just a sling and a stone, but then he was slayed by the giant of lust and then committed murder to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba! Yet, he's still in the Hall of Faith, a "man after God's own heart," who failed miserably along the way. All of these people we've been talking about for the last 2 ½ months have their flaws...and yet, THROUGH FAITH...see it again...verse 33...

Hebrews 11:33

³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Who stopped the mouths of lions...God did, because of Daniel's faith...

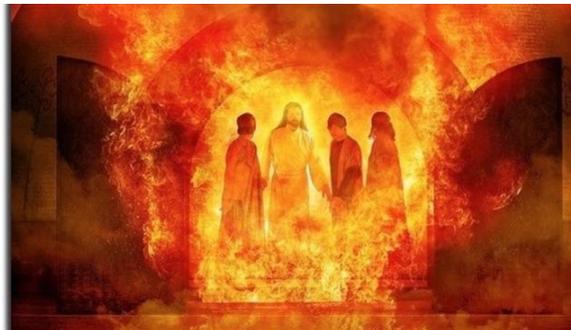


Can you imagine the faith of Daniel to endure that night in that den of lions?

Hebrews 11:34

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.

Who quenched the power of fire...God did, because Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had faith...



And I believe in a preincarnate theophany...Jesus showed in that fiery furnace and the Hebrew men won the victory! So you see these QUICK DESCRIPTIVE BURSTS, Paul gives, would fill the minds and hearts of the Hebrews with so many vivid memories! Paul continues with verse 35...

Hebrews 11:35

³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

Women who received back their dead... Remember, Elijah when he raised the widow of Zarephath's son from the dead? This was the same lady who was down to her last bit of oil and flour and Elijah said, "Fix me a meal and you'll never run out." She did (by faith), and the Lord sustained that oil and flour throughout her lifetime.

And so, with the end of verse 35 you have **35 verses of victory** in the Hall of Faith! From the book of Genesis and Noah's deliverance through the flood all the way to the end of the Old Testament prophets...victorious faith...and that brings us to verse 36 and the tone is going to change. What we're going to see now are people who aren't considered victorious, but instead, good folks, believers, who suffer mightily...

Hebrews 11:36-38

³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two,^[a] 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.

You know when I read through those three verses, I'll be honest, I didn't see victory, did you? I saw suffering and pain, mistreatment and death. I mean, reading those three verses is a bit depressing if you ask me... Mocking, flogging, chains, imprisonment...wandering around in deserts and caves.

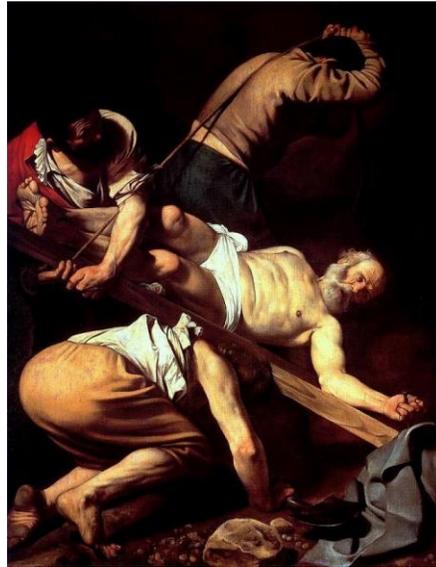
You see, Church, it's true, we HAVE turned a corner in the Hall of Faith. It's not all victory now! Not the way the world defines victory. These are "THE OTHERS." That word in the Greek, that begins verse 36 (others), literally means: "of a different kind or another sort." In other words, these people didn't labor and struggle and then win. These wouldn't be the Christian athletes who win the Superbowl or Christians graduate at the top of their class. No, these people didn't get any trophy. Instead they got pain...

And you see that's what those first-century Hebrews, now turned Christians, were dealing with at the writing of this letter in the mid-60's AD. Pain...suffering! They were some of the ones who were being suited up in animal skins and being fed to lions. No...these "OTHERS" weren't delivered like Daniel from the mouths of lions...no, they were devoured by the mouths of lions.



How does that work in your theology? These OTHERS trusted the Lord when the day was dark and the night was long, and when the suffering didn't materialize into deliverance, but death. **And this brings us full-circle, back to the questions from the beginning of our time together:** "Why do good people suffer? Why do people who are truly and earnestly living for God have to endure so much? Doesn't He care? Or does it mean they just don't have enough faith?" Is that it? We suffer because we don't have enough faith?

Let me ask you something. Did the Apostle Peter not have enough faith; is that why this happened?



I think not!

I read a commentary this week where a Pastor was visiting a sick member in the hospital and the pastor picked up a book on the table beside of the bed. The sick lady said, "Pastor, open it up to the first page and read it." He did and it said, "Read this book, it will give you the faith to be healed." The lady happened to be a wonderfully dedicated Christian lady who was dealing with stage-4 cancer. She told the pastor, "I've prayed to be healed, but it's not happening." The lady died a week later. So, did she not have enough faith?

Absolutely not! Listen carefully, God does not have to heal in order to prove that someone has faith. That lady in the hospital was part of the OTHERS of verse 36...unknown men and women of faith who were NOT delivered FROM difficult circumstances of suffering; but were delivered THROUGH them! Listen, it takes more faith to ENDURE THAN IT DOES TO ESCAPE suffering.

Not everyone is healed. I prayed for my grandfather, as a 17-year-old young man...I prayed with everything I had for his colon cancer to be removed...he was only 66...but, God took him. Does that make God bad...does that mean I didn't have enough faith? No, neither is true! It means God is sovereign and His ways aren't our ways and His thoughts aren't our thoughts and His purposes and plans are above ours...and we live for Him BY FAITH!

You see, I came to the place that I realized that it had to bring God more glory to take my grandfather than to leave him here and church family, sometimes we have to leave it at that. Listen, God knows what He's doing, because He's our good, good Father. You see, it's readily apparent to me, as I turn the pages of Scripture that sometimes God is glorified MORE by NOT delivering His people and instead...showing a watching world...those are my children and they are suffering for my kingdom...and that will reach people even more than a man on a podium holding a trophy. Listen, the absence of deliverance does not mean a lack of faith...that's the way world might see it...but, not the Christian...the Christian knows that God has a bigger plan!

As you are turning let me say this... Church...in this age of the Prosperity Gospel, which teaches that if you follow Jesus everything is going to be a bed of roses...in this age of proof texting Scripture incorrectly...I believe we can be in danger of gathering to ourselves a WRONG THEOLOGY about God and this life. Yes, I know many say if you just quote Philippians 4:13, (I

can do all things through Christ who strengthens me)...well if quote that verse right before you take the next swing in the batter's box, you'll get a base hit or quote it before the test and you'll pass the test...because after all...He has plans to prosper me, not to harm me...right...to give me hope and future... Yes...all that's true...but God's prosperity doesn't look like the world's prosperity. Be careful how you quote Scripture out of context. God's prosperity is His presence. Do you get that? God's prosperity is joy...that goes beyond our circumstances... Did you know the Apostle Paul wrote Philippians 4:13 while he was in prison...

See now the words of Jesus...

John 16:20-22

²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

Did you see it? "NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR JOY FROM YOU." Are you getting this...WHEN we suffer in this life...not IF...but WHEN...the JOY of the PRESENCE OF GOD MATCHES THE PAIN! Listen, the intimacy of Jesus is the richest joy of this life and so, FOR THE OTHERS (vs 36) the greater the pain, the greater the matching joy of the presence of God.

David knew this when he wrote...

Psalms 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

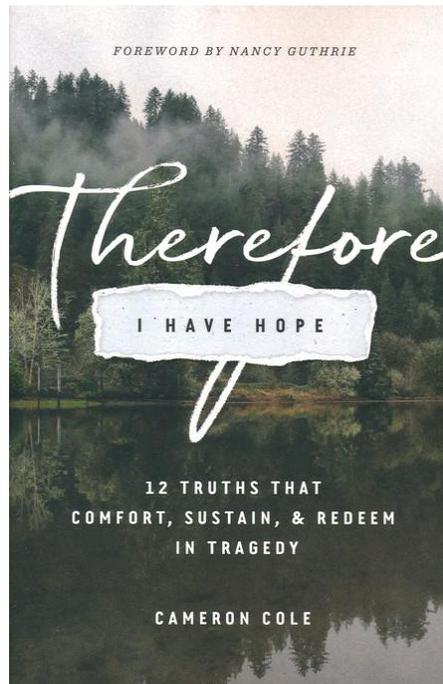
He also wrote in...

Psalms 21:6

For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence.

What is the greatest joy that can ever be known in this life? Being in the presence of God! And I would submit to you today that His presence is felt most when we suffer and hurt the most. And I bet for the Christians in the room, you agree, don't you?

A few weeks ago, I was introduced to this book:



"Therefore, I Have Hope." The author is Cameron Cole. This man...



He is a pastor in Birmingham, Alabama. The little boy he is holding is his namesake, Cameron, whom they called Cam. All was well in their family until one morning, Lauren, (the mother) couldn't wake up Cam. He was 3 years old and seemed to be in perfect health. Yet, he had died in his sleep. An autopsy and genetic testing were performed; and yet, no cause of death was ever discovered.

The book is powerful. It chronicles the Cole's journey in dealing with such a devastating tragedy. As I read the book...I felt the gut-churning, range of emotions that they went through. He described how they had many well-meaning people (church members, friends) try to cheer them up with all kinds of trite little sayings...like, "My God didn't have anything to do with this...He would never allow something like that to happen." Yet, Cole said the idea that God didn't have anything to do with Cam's death actually terrified him. He said, "That would have destroyed my entire worldview... Because I would have falsely believed that God is holding all things together and everything is moving toward an appointed end, but if God wasn't in control when my son died, then He's not in control of anything."

Cameron, the father went on to say, “One reason I’ve been able to accept all of this is because God had to give up His Son. He knows exactly how I feel. He understands my experience, because that was His experience. God is a suffering God. He understands us. He feels with us. Your feelings are safe with him.”

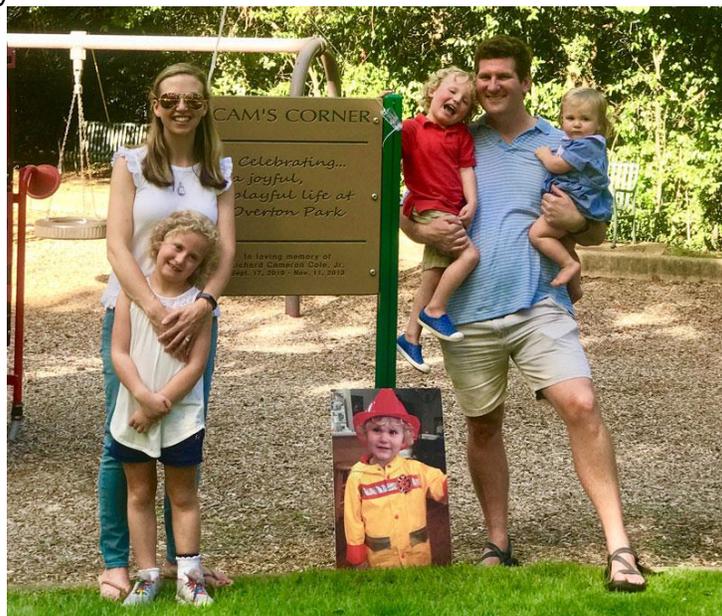
There’s something else that’s so poignant that I read that I want you to hear and to see...

“If God had nothing to do with my son’s death, then certain pockets of life—the really awful ones in particular—are given over to chaos because the God of the universe is removed from them. In the case of my Worst, and in the case of yours, if God is not involved, then it has no purpose. My receiving the traumatic phone call, my holding Cam’s corpse, my attending his funeral, my carrying his casket, and my weeping and weeping and weeping, would all be meaningless because God had nothing to do with it. But that is a lie. According to the Bible, God is sovereign. He was in control before, during and after my Worst, and he is in control throughout yours. Consequently, your Worst has meaning. Your Worst has purpose.

For me, I find hope in trusting that my son died because God determined before the foundation of the earth that Cam would live three years and fifty-five days. My son died for a reason: he died that people may see the beauty and majesty of Jesus Christ and that God may fully redeem and perfect the broken world. Cam’s death is neither random nor meaningless. I may not necessarily see a fraction of the ways God accomplishes this, but his Word promises me that it is true. Let me tell you the truth: *your Worst is not random or meaningless.*” Cameron Cole, *Therefore, I Have Hope*

Folks...Cameron and Lauren Cole are part of the OTHERS...of verse 36. They didn’t get to keep their son...but, they have won the victory, because they are experiencing the presence of Jesus. His presence, His grace, is matching their pain!

Here’s their family today:



They’ve added another little boy and another little girl. How are they living life? By faith...by faith. That’s Hebrews 11. And as I finished the book, here’s the thing that really grabbed me. Cameron said this:

“We're connected to Cameron through Christ, because it's like Cameron is on one side of a giant oak tree, hugging the oak tree, and I'm on the other side of the oak tree, hugging the oak tree. I can't see him and He can't see me. I can't hear him and he can't hear me. But we're both hugging the same oak tree and that oak tree is Jesus Christ and one day, I will see my son again in the presence of Jesus...but until then...I hug Jesus!”

And that's verses 39-40...the Cole's are waiting for the future promise...

Hebrews 11:39-40

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

That something better for the Hebrews was the fact that Jesus came and fulfilled all of the shadows that were cast by the Old Testament prophecies, that pointed to Him, the Savior, the One who would come in fulfillment of all those OT prophecies, the One who would step out of the shadows of the Old Covenant...bringing with His death and resurrection...a new covenant by His blood! Listen...until we see Jesus face to face...we hug the oak tree. How? By Faith...
