

The Achievements of Faith Hebrews 11:32-40

After seventeen messages from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we will now finish this great chapter on faith. The whole purpose of Hebrews 11 was a design by God to teach Christians not to become discouraged in their Christian walks, but to persevere, endure, and push on for Christ by faith, believing in the unseen God to work supernaturally for them.

As you remember, these Hebrew-Christians to whom the author was writing this book were undergoing some very difficult social persecution from the unsaved Jews. Consequently, many were discouraged, and some were even thinking of giving up Christianity to go back into Judaism. The author of Hebrews calls the people to perseverance and encourages them to push on for Christ.

THE MIGHTY ACTS OF FAITH BY OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS - Hebrews 11:32-40

It becomes obvious that these Old Testament believers did mighty acts for God by faith. They believed God, and God honored their faith. Yet, they paid a tremendous price at times for what they believed. They were deprived of things, snatched from families, thrown in prison, terribly tortured, and many were martyred because they believed in the one, true God who promised the Messiah to come and His kingdom. No amount of suffering on earth would make them give up their faith. They were totally convinced of God's promise of heaven and the future resurrection unto life.

The world was not worthy of these Old Testament believers who trusted in God, but they were great because they had great faith in the one, true God. They persevered when "they did not receive what was promised"; that is, they had not seen the Messiah (Jesus Christ) and His kingdom in earthly or eternal form. We who live in the New Testament age have a "better" grasp of God's plans and purposes than did the Old Testament saints. We now know that Messiah had to come and salvation be made available to all nations through His death, and the Church formed before God's eternal plans could be completed. The Old Testament saints could not be "made perfect," or "whole," or "complete" without the New Testament saints who form the total Body of Christ and await His second coming.

THE MIGHTY ACTS OF FAITH BY NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS

Not only Old Testament saints suffered for Christ, but New Testament Christians have all suffered greatly for their convictions concerning Christ, who has come. In 2,000 years of church history, Christians have paid a great price to be true to the one, true, and living God as He is manifested in Christ Jesus. All of what we enjoy today as Christians in America (and we may not enjoy it much longer) is the result of true Christians who did mighty acts for God by faith and suffered and died rather than renounce Jesus Christ.

I fear that a generation of Christians has arisen that knows nothing and cares nothing for its

historical past. *“... and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel”* (Judges 2:10). We must understand our Christian history and tell it to our people just as the Jews of old recounted their history to their children. *“O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, the work that Thou didst in their days, in the days of old”* (Psalm 44:1).

Apostles:

The Twelve Apostles did many mighty acts for God and turned the first century world upside down for Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached, and 3,000 souls were saved and baptized. With great perseverance, the Apostles took the gospel as far as India and China. All the Apostles died as martyrs except John. Peter refused to die in the same manner as his Lord, so they crucified him upside down.

Early Christians:

The early Christians achieved great things for God because they had faith and were willing to pay the price to follow Christ. Christians were crucified, fed to mad dogs, tied to bulls and dragged to death, burned at the stake, used as gladiators' bait, and thrown to the lions, but they would not deny Jesus Christ as the only Savior.

A good illustration is Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. Polycarp was arrested and brought into the amphitheater in Smyrna, which was filled with multitudes. Since there were no images of gods in the houses of worship of the Christians, the heathen rightly concluded that the Christians did not believe in the existence of the gods, and they accused him of being an atheist. The proconsul reminded Polycarp of his great age, and urged him to show his penitence by joining in the cry, “Away with the atheists!” Then the proconsul said, “Revile Christ, and I will release you.” But Polycarp answered, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme Him, my King, who has saved me? I am a Christian.” To the crowd the proconsul then proclaimed, “Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian.” The crowd yelled, “Let him be burned!”

Athanasius:

Have you heard of Athanasius, a deacon in North Africa, who opposed Arius, a bishop, on the question of Christ's deity? Athanasius stood firm for the truth that Jesus Christ is very God and very man, but what a price he paid. He was banished six times from his homeland. So determined was Athanasius to hold forth the truth that he offended everyone, and people would say, “Athanasius against the world and the world against Athanasius!” Thank God for this studious and faithful deacon!

Chrysostom:

Do you know of Chrysostom, the gold-mouthed preacher of the fourth century, who preached with such power and authority that his church was filled with such attentive listeners that they would sit spellbound for hours. The people at times got so excited that they stood to their feet, clapped their hands and stomped their feet. Through this man's preaching thousands of sinners were saved by God's infinite and sovereign grace. Yet, Chrysostom paid the price, for he was banished from his homeland because he dared to oppose an empress.

Waldenses:

Have your fathers told you about the Waldenses? As popery was strengthening its death grip on the continent of Europe in the Middle Ages, there was this group of people in northern Italy and France called the Waldenses. They were a shining light in great darkness, but what a price they paid for faithfulness to Jesus Christ. They were terribly persecuted by the Roman Catholics and so many were martyred that they fled to the Alps. They were threatened with extinction because their “blood flowed like water,” but they stayed true to Christ and His gospel.

Sarvonarola:

Sarvonarola was a reforming monk in the Roman Church who attacked the corruption of popery. He was condemned and sentenced to death. As he was being burned at the stake by the Church of Rome, he said, “I warn you, O Italy, I warn you, O Rome, the only thing that can save you is Jesus Christ!”

Wycliffe:

One hundred and fifty years before the Reformation, John Wycliffe, a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, denounced the Roman Church as “Anti-Christ,” and declared the only head of the Church to be Christ. Wycliffe became a hunted man. He trained pastors, called Lollards, and smuggled Bibles into England so that almost every market town and hamlet in England had some kind of gospel witness. Wycliffe spent most of his time in hiding, for he was sentenced to death by the Roman Catholic Church.

Huss:

John Huss, who lived one hundred years before the Reformation, was a priest and became the head of the theological department at the University of Prague, in what is now Czechoslovakia. He was converted to Christ and spoke out against the Roman Church. He would not bow his knee to the pope, so he was condemned as a heretic. Huss’s writings later had a great influence on Martin Luther.

On the day of his martyrdom, Huss was dressed in full vestments of a priest. Then, one by one, every article of clothing was stripped from him with lewd remarks made about him. A paper cap was placed upon his head which said, “Here is the Heresiarch - the arch heretic.”

Luther:

When the darkness of superstition covered the earth, when popery sat upon her throne and stretched her powers across the nations, God raised up Martin Luther in the sixteenth century. Luther came forth and preached the gospel of the grace of God, and how the world trembled. It appeared that the Roman Church would stand for another thousand years, but God had His servant, the monk, Martin Luther, who believed God and laid an axe to Romanism. Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Church, and upon receiving the excommunication paper from the pope, he said, “The Pope’s decretals are the Devil’s excretals!” When he was summoned by the king and pope to appear before the Diet of Worms, his friends pleaded with him not to go, but he said, “If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the roofs of houses, I would not fear. I will go!” When at the Diet of Worms, Luther was told to recant of his views or face certain death. He again replied, “It is impossible for me to recant unless I am proved to be wrong by the testimony of Scripture. My conscience is bound to the Word of God. It is neither

safe nor honest to act against one's conscience. Here I stand. God help me. I cannot do otherwise." Luther, from that time on, became the most wanted heretic by the Roman Church.

Calvin:

When the Reformation was faltering, God raised up John Calvin, and what mighty acts this man did by faith. At age twenty-six, he wrote The Institutes of Christian Religion, which became the theological textbook for the Reformation throughout Europe. From Geneva, Switzerland came hundreds of missionaries that went into all of Europe, preaching the gospel of grace in Christ. At first Calvin's reform in Geneva was greatly despised because people hated church discipline. After a few years in Geneva, he was forced to leave the city but was later brought back and given a free hand in the Reformation. Calvin was despised, mocked and several attempts were made on his life by hateful Roman Catholics.

Calvin could not walk across the street without being mocked, "There he goes, neighbor. I prefer to hear three dogs barking than to listen to him preach." "Did you know, hell has only two devils, and there goes one of them!" Children called after him, twisting his name, "Cain, Cain!" More than one dog answered to the name "Calvin!"

Anabaptists:

Do you know of the Anabaptists? Those of the Reformation who were neither Lutheran nor Calvinists were Anabaptists. These people loved the Lord Jesus. They stood in some ways more firmly against Rome than did any of the Reformers. It is true that they were free will in theology and radicals, but they made a tremendous contribution to the Christian world. Their contribution was a biblical concept of the local church. The Anabaptists suffered terribly at the hands of Roman Catholics and Lutherans, but they would not deny their beliefs for any man. Because they believed strongly in baptism by immersion, many were martyred by drowning or being burned alive.

No one group of Christians, then or now, has all the truth, but each group has made a significant contribution to the whole of the Church.

Calvinists:

The Calvinists carried the main thrust of the Reformation and suffered tremendously. The French Calvinists were called Huguenots. On St. Bartholomew's Day, the Roman Catholic queen called out the armies and had approximately 50,000 Huguenots killed. The Calvinists in the Netherlands were called Reformed and their struggle with Rome cost them 100,000 lives. They were burned, strangled, beheaded, and buried alive, but they would not renounce their faith in Jesus Christ.

Much of our political and religious freedom in America is due to the faithful stand of Calvinists in Europe.

Knox:

John Knox, who trained at Calvin's school in Geneva, led the Reformation in Scotland. He was able to have that small country throw off the yoke of Romanism, and from that land came the great evangelical and Presbyterian revivals. So godly was Knox, the Roman Catholic Queen

Mary (better known as Bloody Mary for her persecution of Protestants) said, “I fear the prayers of John Knox more than I fear all the armies of Europe!”

Latimer and Ridley:

After Protestantism had been established in England, various kings and queens tried to reestablish the Roman Church as the national church of England. During this time, two great bishops in the Church of England were put to death. Bishops Ridley and Latimer were burned for denying transubstantiation (the bread and wine turning into the actual body and blood of Christ). As the flames curled around their bodies, Latimer spoke courage and comfort to his fellow martyrs, “This day we shall light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”

Bunyan:

Have your fathers told you of John Bunyan? Once the Church of England had been securely made the national church of England, they began to persecute Christians who did not bow to the Church of England. John Bunyan, a Baptist, was one of these, and he was thrown into prison for twelve years. He was accused of preaching in the open air, and he insisted upon going into the “highways and byways” to preach. They said to him, “If you will promise not to preach in the open air, you can be released.” Bunyan replied, “If you release me today, I’ll have to preach in the fields tomorrow.” It was John Bunyan who, during those years in prison, wrote the most famous Christian book. Pilgrim’s Progress.

Whitefield:

George Whitefield was the founder of Methodism. It was not John Wesley, as some suppose. Whitefield preached in a day when the Church of England, as a whole, was slumbering. Irreligion was the rule of the day. The streets seemed to teem with iniquity, and the gutters were filled full with sin. Whitefield left the security of a church pulpit and began to preach to thousands in the fields and streets of England. The whole Church of England turned against him and it was a rare phenomenon to find a church pulpit that was open to him. As he preached, the power of God came upon people and one after another fell down smitten. It was not strange to see three thousand people at a time under Holy Spirit conviction when Whitefield preached.

Time fails me to tell of the Wesleys, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, William Carey, David Livingston, John Patton, Hudson Taylor, D. L. Moody, Machen, Warfield, Doss Trotman, Martin Lloyd Jones, Bill Bright, or Billy Graham.

These are but a few of the men of fame in Christian history, but what about the multiple millions of faithful saints who lived and died in obedience to Christ? In the twentieth century, millions of Christians have suffered and died behind the Iron Curtain.

People who have believed God have done mighty acts for God and achieved many spiritual works that have seemed humanly impossible. What great revivals have come because God worked supernaturally and men believed God. Think of the Reformation, of the great revivals in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. What about the Puritan revivals in the Great Awakening in America? Or the Second Awakening, or the revivals in the Southern States near the end of the Civil War?

God has done great things! Faith has done mighty acts! We must tell of His wonders. Speak of them in the streets. Teach them to our children. We must not let them be forgotten, for the mighty hand of the Lord has done marvelous things through the faith of His people.

THE SECRET TO DOING MIGHTY ACTS FOR GOD

Faith:

You will notice that whenever mighty acts of God were done in olden times, they have been by someone or some group who had very great faith. How big is your faith? Do you believe at this very moment, that if God willed it, every soul in Roanoke could be converted now? Do you believe He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy? And that God will do as He pleases and none can stay His hand? "Well," you might say, "I know God can do anything, but I do not expect Him to do it in our time. Why we live in a scientific age, and furthermore, the Lord may be coming. No I do not expect revival." Then, my dear friend, you will not be disappointed, for you will not see revival or God work mighty acts, but those who expect them shall see them. Men of great faith do great things.

Word:

Whenever there has been a revival, there has been a great interest in the Bible and believing it to be God's Word. Revival is nothing more than re-Bible.

Prayer:

With faith, always comes mighty prayer. All the mighty works of God have been attended by great prayer. When men begin to pray individually and collectively, in small groups and in large groups, and when they bombard the Throne of Grace, God works supernaturally.

One revival in America began by prayer alone. A man, unknown and obscure, laid it up in his heart to pray that God would bless his country. After praying and wrestling and making the soul-stirring inquiry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" he hired a room, and put up an announcement that there would be a prayer meeting held there at such and such an hour of the day. He went at the proper hour, and there was not a single person there; he began to pray and prayed for half an hour alone. One came in at the end of the half hour, and then two more, and I think he closed with six. The next week came around, and there might have been fifty dropping in at different times. At last the prayer meeting grew to a hundred, then others began to start prayer meetings. At last there was scarcely a street in New York that was without a prayer meeting. Merchants found time to come in the middle of the day to pray. The prayer meetings became daily ones, lasting for about an hour. Petitions and requests were sent up; these were simply asked and offered before God, and the answers came; and many were the happy hearts that stood up and testified that prayer offered last week had been already fulfilled. Then it was when they were all earnest in prayer, suddenly the Spirit of God fell upon the people, and it was rumored that in a certain village a preacher; had been preaching in thorough earnest, and there had been hundreds converted in a week. And so a revival began because a common man believed God to pray.

Revival:

Mighty acts of God are seen by men who believe in revival. The great thrust of their lives was to see sinners converted and the Great Commission fulfilled: ***“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”*** God can bring us revival again, and He will do it if He so pleases. We must believe God for what seems to be humanly impossible. God’s arm is not shortened that He cannot save, nor His ear heavy that He cannot hear.

We have, in our day, huge churches, massive organization, and famous preachers, but we lack power. Perhaps we are preaching without prayer. O dear people, let us agonize in prayer for God to pour His power out on us. We will never get a revival unless we believe that it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, that can do it.

CONCLUSION

Do you know Christ? Have you been born of God’s Spirit? Do you have the assurance that your sins are forgiven and you have eternal life? Have you come to the point in your experience where you have committed yourself to Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

You must trust Christ, and once you know Him, then everything else in life is secondary, for in Christ is the answer to death and life. When you know Christ, then physical death is better than to deny Him. No amount of suffering or persecution will ever cause you to stop trusting in Christ, for in Him is life eternal. I ask you once again, do you know Christ?