

Hebrews 11:1-3, 5-6, 8-16 Hebrews 11:32-124

By Faith We Endure

Sunday September 18th, 2022

By faith we endure. Sometimes simply by enduring with the little faith and strength we have...we will find faith and life.

Many years ago, I told you the story of my family's visit to the Grand Canyon. We took a mule ride down, and on the way back we watched a woman get kicked over the edge by one of the mules in our mule team.

To this day I can remember her hands desperately holding as the mule train wrangler reached to her and she said, "Please don't let me die. I have two children." It was the most genuine, pitiful cry for help I ever heard.

To me it seemed forever for the mule train wrangler to get to her and to her it must have seemed a lifetime. But she endured long enough that the mule train driver grabbed her arm and pulled her back over the edge.

In today's verses we hear a call to courage and endurance in our faith by remembering the heroes of our faith from the past. We remember those who triumphed thru faith and those who suffered for faith, and in the eyes of the world utterly failed.

But those who suffered for their faith were looking beyond the trial, the hard testing to the reward laid out before them, which is the New Jerusalem, the City of God; in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Verse one is very famous in Christian circles, “**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.**” We then have a long list of those who triumphed in this world through their faith. Abraham, David, Gideon, Samson, and others who though not directly named, are hinted at through their exploits like Daniel.

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These people lived out with confidence what they hoped for. Not that they were ever without fears and doubts, but when it was needed most, they carried on with the faith that God was there to help and protect them, and guide them in life.

Now verse 35 has always fascinated me. It reads, “**Women received back their dead, raised to life again.**

There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.”

Right in the middle of that verse it switches from those who did great things for God and received great things from God like loved ones risen from the dead, to... people who suffered horribly for their faith. Faith at times leads to great triumph and sometimes it leads to great sacrifice and suffering, which is why endurance is then so desperately needed.

When verse 37 says, “**They were put to death by stoning (It was a reference to Jeremiah being stoned to death).** When 37 says, “**they were sawed in two (it was a reference to Isaiah who was sawed in half while alive.)** Those reading or hearing the words of the writer of Hebrews would also be reminded of the suffering of the Maccabees for the faith when it says, “**they were killed by the sword.”**

It goes on to again highlight the suffering of the Maccabees who were “destitute, persecuted, mistreated, wandered in deserts and lived in caves and holes in the ground.” The Maccabees suffered under Antiochus IV Epiphanes who tried to destroy the Jewish faith and replace it with Greek customs and the worship of Greek gods.

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Their suffering and resistance led eventually to the reestablishment of Temple worship, the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, and later when you think of it the birth of the Messiah Jesus the Christ. Because Antiochus Epiphanes was intent on the destruction of the Jewish faith.

You can read about the brave and courageous endurance of the Maccabees by reading 1st thru 4th Maccabees that are in the Apocrypha. These books are the history of the brave defense of the Jewish faith under gruesome persecution. In Maccabees 4 you will read of the torture and death of the 7 brothers whose deaths were so gruesome that I can't mention them here, but I encourage you to read of the cost of passing on the faith of our Jewish fathers and mothers that led to the birth of Jesus the Christ.

And they hung on with faith and hope looking forward, like we do, to the New Heaven and Earth. We look forward to our home in Heaven that Jesus promised us. Vs 10 says, “For he (Abraham) was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” And verse 16, “Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

The writer of Hebrews lays out some of our basic beliefs of faith. First, “God is the Creator of the universe that was formed at God's command.” Second, Faith is needed, “because anyone who comes to

God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

The question is how do we develop and grow an enduring faith? How do we grow a faith in the times of peace in our lives that will withstand the times of trial and testing.

First, read and know the Bible and even the Apocrypha. Know the stories of the heroes of our faith, so in times of fear, need and anxiety we can remember how God has acted to help his people in the past, and know thru faith that God will act today. **X Slide off**

These stories will give us assurance of what we do not see. So, simply read the Bible. Go to one of the many Bible studies we have here at Vista or pick up one online.

Find a “read thru the Bible” guide. You can use the Upper Room. Or Disciple or the Moravian Texts like I do and members of my huddles. The readers of these chapters in Hebrews were encouraged, because they knew the stories of these heroes of their faith.

Second, keep your eye on the prize of Jesus Christ in Heaven, the City of God. Run that good race. Cast off the sin and bad habits that cling. And if you can run, walk! Limp! Endure the painful walk to get there.

Third, Remain in fellowship together. It’s the Church as a whole that will enter the New Jerusalem, the City of God. It will enter as Christ’s bride. Verses 39-40 reveal a great mystery and promise, **“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,**

since God had planned something better for us so that **ONLY TOGETHER WITH US** would they be made perfect.”

Fourth, witness to and with the little faith you have! Endure, hold on to the edge of the Grand Canyon, and your God will come to you and provide. **X Slide off**

I loved last Sunday's Upper Room devotional about the women who struggled with various health issues from birth that eventually left her blind. She wrote, "Honestly, all that I've gone through sometimes seems a bit senseless, and I don't feel like my faith has been strengthened as a result.

I am thankful for God's blessings; but while scripture says we should have patience in suffering, I just want the surgeries and pain to end." It goes on to say how she went to a woman's prison and shared her story, which was well received with shouts of Amen and Hallelujah, hugs and tears.

She dared to share her faith and doubt, and then found as she said, "Perhaps when suffering does not refine our own faith it can offer inspiration for others. While I may not feel like my faith has grown because of my health, I have not abandoned it. Rather, I hold on to faith despite my trials. And maybe that's what really matters."

I can only say amen to that. She has enduring faith.

She has learned the truth of the scripture on the cover of our bulletin, "**Count it all joy my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of any kind, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance;**

and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." Often the important thing is to hang on endure. Not with any sense of joy but with a stubborn determination.

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So, share your faith. Share what you know. Don't worry about what you don't know, share what you do know, and God will strengthen your faith in the sharing. Sometimes the Holy Spirit gives you what you need to say.

Finally, remember that Great Crowd of witnesses is there. It is all around you. These people of faith that that have died they aren't gone forever for remember our God is the God of the living not the dead.

Today we are recognizing the 32 members of our congregation that are 90 plus. As I have gone over your names I have been encouraged by your faithfulness and I know that the generations following you have been inspired. Your endurance is part of the promise of the Word of God, which is long life here on earth for those who love and follow God and eternal life when your work down here is done.

We all have heroes in the faith. We have aunts and uncles, Moms and dads, grandparents and friends and pastors, who have inspired us and guided us in our lives of faith.

These saints from the Bible and your lives, who have run the same race of faith before you they now sit in the stands cheering you on. And we will only finish the race when we all finish the race together.

“At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Derek Redmond had qualified for the semifinal of the 400m with the fastest time in his heat. He was looking strong when suddenly he pulled up -- his hamstring had torn.



Rather than crumble to the ground, Redmond continued hobbling toward the finish line. Surprisingly, he didn't have to finish the race

alone. Redmond's father, Jim, ran from the stands and brushed off security to join his son. With tears in both of their eyes, the Redmonds finished the race together.”

The truth is we are all injured runners, and we will never get across the finish line on our own. We are sinners in need of a Savior,... and we are in need each other here on earth in order to run our race of faith. And yeah, sometimes God or a best friend needs to carry us across the finish line.

It's going to be painful at times and maybe even bloody for some of us as the writer of Hebrews warns in the last verse. But it is together we are going to move onto perfection now and forevermore.

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Friends, read and study the heroes of our faith in the Bible and in our history. Think about the heroes who inspired your faith, and even thank them if they are still alive, today.

Stay in fellowship with one another. Commit to worship, Bible studies and small groups and you will grow an enduring faith.

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?

In Jesus name amen.

