

Title: "Commended for their Faith!"

Text: Hebrews 11:32-40

Last Sunday for Easter we jumped ahead to the beginning of chapter 12 of the Book of Hebrews to:

*"...fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

That was just an Easter kind of thing to do!

-But today I want to take us back to finish off chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews.

-Most of you know we have been using this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews as a guide for what "Living Faith in 3D" actually looks like.

The writer of the letter has been directing our attention to a whole variety of Old Testament figures,

-who, each in their own generation and in their own situations, lived out a life of faith in this broken world.

Today we come to the end of the list.

-But because there are so many others the writer could have used as further examples,

-he simply gives us a summary statement of the "many more" he could have mentioned.

But it is a powerful summary statement, that tells us a great deal about living faith in and of itself.

-Listen to what he says in summation. (Read 32-40)

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*"All these were commended for their faith."*

My friends, what's fascinating to me here,

-is that the writer to the Hebrews boldly proclaims that:

-living faith for some people led them to conquer kingdoms, overcome enemies, administer justice, shut the mouths of lions, and quench the fury of flames.

-But for others, living faith led them to face jeers and floggings

- be chained and put in prison, endure torture, get stoned to death or be cut in two.
- For some it meant living destitute, persecuted, mistreated lives,
  - wearing sheepskins or goatskins,
  - wandering in deserts and mountains,
  - and finding shelter in caves and holes in the ground.

“The world was not worthy of them,” the writer says.

And isn't that remarkable: the faith of these downtrodden ones is just as commendable as the faith of those who conquered kingdoms and were victorious over enemies.

Somehow all of them exhibited living faith no matter what the outward results of their lives.

Somehow, all of them experienced God's presence and found Him worthy to be trusted all along the way.

And ultimately, the victorious weren't commended for their apparent successes in life,  
-nor were the downtrodden chided for their apparent lack of success in life.

They were ALL commended by God,  
-and what was commended was their living faith.  
-They trusted in God for whatever they faced, and whatever the outcome.

That is the first thing I want you to note about living faith today.  
-Success is not the goal.  
-Faithfulness is the goal.

2. Now here's the second thing that fascinates me about this passage.

- If you actually go back and look at the lives of all the people named in these summary verses,
  - or the lives of all those we have spent more time with in the previous verses,
  - you find that in fact, there really aren't two sets of people: the victorious ones and the downtrodden ones.

You actually find that everyone in the whole chapter  
-actually experienced both times of victory and times of  
downtrodden-ness.

He begins this summary list with Gideon, Barak, Samson, and  
Jephthah.

-These men all lived in the period of Israel's history called  
the time of the Judges.

-And it was an up and down period for Israel of victory and  
defeat, victory and defeat, victory and defeat.

Each of these men listed, along with many others and even a  
woman named Deborah,

-were called by God to lead the nation of Israel in battles  
against the neighboring nations which kept attacking  
Israel.

-These leaders were called Judges.

-If you read their stories, you see that they all experienced  
times of utter defeat and downtrodden-ness.

-But by God's grace, they also saw God do amazing acts  
and turn their weakness into strength.

When God shows up to call Gideon to serve as a leader of  
Israel,

-God finds Gideon hiding out in a big vat that was used to  
crush grapes in a vineyard.

-He is weak and scared of the enemy, and begins as one of  
those the writer here mentions as living in a hole in the  
ground.

-He's hiding in a pit.

But God calls this timid young man to lead his people in battle,

-and it is not that Gideon by faith turns into an Arnold  
Schwarzenegger.

-No, it's that Gideon by faith learns to trust that God will  
fight battles for him, and all he has to do is trust and  
obey.

And he somehow becomes one of the victorious ones  
mentioned here in Hebrews.

-But my friends, all through his story, he is both the  
downtrodden and the victor.

And that's the way they all are.

- King David, who is ultimately the great and victorious King of Israel begins his anointed life as one of those who must wander in deserts and mountains, and hide out in caves.
- He spends years running away from King Saul, who feels threatened by David and wants to kill him.

David spends years and years as the downtrodden and persecuted one.

- But those are years not only used by God to develop a deep and abiding faith in David;
- they are also years where along the way, David also experiences all kinds of victories, too.

He discovers that though Saul may be out to get him,

- and he may be wandering in mountains and hiding in caves,
- God is with him, and he has friends who come alongside him, and his life is spared from Saul's attempts to kill him time and time again.
- He really is not so downtrodden, even though he is being chased and harassed and treated unfairly.

In spite of all that, there are blessings from God all along the way....and a living faith is being nurtured in him richly.

And then ultimately David becomes the king of Israel,

- and one might think that then he has it made in the shade.
- Life is good, he lives in a palace and has money, sex, and power.

But David discovers that the victorious and successful life of a king has a whole host of issues, challenges, and temptations of its own.

- The money, sex, and power thing can ruin your life just as quickly as the persecuted and mistreated thing can do.

David's years as king are years in which he also has to rely on his faith in God in all kinds of ways he had never needed to before.

And they are years in which he has plenty of down times when even as King he feels like a failure.

You see, no one on the list here in Hebrews 11 is ever just one or the other: victor or downtrodden.

-All of them are both.

-And every season of life requires its own sort of faith in God.

In times when we feel destitute, misunderstood and mistreated,

-we need to rely on God and trust in him in one sort of way.

In times when we feel victorious, and successful, and prosperous,

-we need to rely on God and trust in him in another sort of way.

Each season has its own troubles; each season has its own rewards.

-The lives of the Judges, the lives of the Kings, the lives of the prophets,

-the lives of the people of the whole Bible bear witness to this.

-And the Bible itself says, what commends a person to God is their faith in Him.

This is what the writer to the Hebrews is calling us to see and understand for our own lives.

In the end, what really matters is whether in all the seasons of our lives,

-we were able to discover God's presence with us and trust Him to see us through that season.

Whether it's a good season or a bad season, a time of plenty or of want, in sickness or in health, success or failure:

-can we abide in Him, and find in Him the strength we need to run the race marked out for us in that season.

And the funny thing is, for those who trust and abide in him,

-there are joys and victories and fulfillments of God's promises all along the way.

It is true what the writer to the Hebrews says about none of these people in the Old Testament receiving what had been promised.

-That is true in the sense that none of them received the fullness of all that God had promised to do for them.

But that doesn't mean that they didn't receive all kinds of fulfillments of promises along the way.

- Moses didn't make it into the promised land itself,
- but he not only got to see it from the mountain-top,
- he also got to see God do amazing acts of deliverance and provision and leading and guiding all along the way.
- He saw the signs and wonders in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna and quail in the wilderness, the water from the rock.
- He saw so many signs of God's faithfulness to His promises that there was joy in the journey,
- even though there was hardship all along the way.

You see what I mean?

- And though Joshua was the one who actually got to enter into the land of promise,
- well, he discovered that wasn't all milk and honey either!
- He had to fight to take the land, and there was no more manna or quail delivered to their doorsteps.
- They had to start farming the land for themselves.
- It was work for them now.
- But they saw so many signs of God's faithfulness to His promise that there were joys all along the way.

This is the way living faith works.

- You see, it's always multi-dimensional.
- And the key ingredient is God Himself.

He is the One who shows up in these people's lives and invites them to follow him.

He is the One who opens their eyes to this whole other dimension of life which includes Him.

- And He is the One who then begins to draw them into faith by showing Himself to be faithful to them.

And that process of developing faith was not easy for any of them.

- It didn't come naturally to any of them.
- If you read the Bible, you discover that none of them are

really very saintly at all.  
-In fact, they're just like us.

But God keeps at it with them, and what they are commended for is simply keeping at it with God.

- By his grace, they persevere.
- When they stumble and fall, they accept God's help to get back up.
- When they sin, they accept God's word of conviction, and they repent and ask for forgiveness.
- When they face obstacles or enemies that are too much for them to contend with, they cry out for help.
- When they experience victories and moments of redemption they sing praises.

They just keep at it with God.

- They keep practicing this daily kind of abiding in Him.
- They keep praying and asking for help.
- They keep repenting of sin and asking for forgiveness.
- They keep listening to His word and asking for help to obey

This is what living faith looks like.

- It is not complicated, but it is daily.
- And it doesn't seem like much, but it matters greatly.
- It actually matters more than anything else we do in life.

It's what keeps us going no matter what we face in this life.

- And it is the only thing we will ever be commended for in the life to come.
- It's not your resume God cares about.
- It's not your job title, your salary, your status in the community.
- It's not the kind of car you drive or clothes you wear or watch you have on your wrist.
- It's not whether you were a pastor or missionary,  
-or whether you were a butcher or baker or candlestick maker.

What matters in eternity is whether you responded to God's love by loving him back.

- Whether you responded to his invitation to follow by following Him.

-Whether you learned throughout the seasons of your life to trust Him and rely on him and abide in him.

True success in the end, is having learned more and more in our lives to walk in God's ways by faith.

-Trusting not in ourselves, but in him.

-And discovering all along the way that He is faithful,

-and that He can turn our weaknesses to strength,

-and redeem our failures, and magnify our victories

-and even turn our deaths into resurrections.

All these were commended for their faith.

-That is what we want to be commended for, too.