

Faith Explained and Illustrated Part Three: Hebrews 11:23-40

Hebrews 11:23-40 Introduction

- Jesus once posed the following question:
- *When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*
 - Luke 18:8
- No answer was ever recorded at the time.

- We've been looking at biblical faith.
- An ancient rabbi has been explaining and illustrating it for us through this entire chapter.
- We've seen that biblical faith is not unreasonable, not "a leap in the dark," as some might put it, but it does require us to take certain risks.
- Life itself, alas, is inherently risky.

- In the previous section our rabbi made all the following points:
 1. Faith may require uncertainty.
 2. Faith may look unimpressive.
 3. Faith may pull off the impossible.
 4. Faith may not let us look back.
 5. Faith may require great sacrifice.
 6. Faith makes us look past ourselves.

- We've also repeatedly stated the following:
 - Biblical faith is our willing response to God, expressed inwardly by submissive trust, and outwardly by obedience.
- We might also put it like this:

"Faith is confidence that results in action carried out in a variety of situations by ordinary people in response to the unseen God and his promises, with various earthly outcomes but always the ultimate outcome of God's commendation and reward."

George H. Guthrie

Hebrews 11:23-40 Outline

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| II. | Faith can win great victories. | 11:30-34 |
| III. | Faith suffers with a goal. | 11:35-38 |
| IV. | Who's next? | 11:39-40 |

Let's now read the entire chapter.

Biblical faith is our willing response to God, expressed inwardly by submissive trust, and outwardly by obedience.

Faith transforms our values. 11:23-29

- The first lesson we learn from Moses comes from his parents.
- Pharaoh commanded that all male babies among the Israelites should be killed.
- Moses's parents feared God more than they feared the king.
- They desired the approval of God more than the approval of the king.
- As a result we have the story of Moses.

- Parents: The most important thing you can pass on to your kids is a godly heritage.
- The story of Moses begins with two people named Amram and Jochebed (Ex. 6:20).
- They are far less famous than their son, but they exercised a courageous faith before he ever had the chance.
- Moses later followed in their footsteps.

- Moses, being the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, was well-educated and mighty in words and deeds. (Acts 7:22)
- But at age 40, Moses's faith motivated him to reject his place among the elite and cast his lot with the people of God:
- He declined a life of prestige and privilege.
 - He rejected its pleasure. (11:25)
 - He rejected its treasure. (11:26)

- But at age 40 he was still too young and impetuous, too inexperienced, and not yet sufficiently humble to be used greatly by God.
- He still needed another 40 years, this time in the desert raising sheep.
- At age 80, God called him back to Egypt to deliver the people of Israel out of bondage.
- And he did so courageously.

"Moses chose the imperishable, saw the invisible, and did the impossible."

○ *Vance Havner (1901-1986), Bible teacher*

- The example of Moses shows us that true biblical faith causes us to obey God – regardless of our circumstances and in spite of the consequences.
- Faith transformed the values of Moses.
- And God used Moses to transform a nation and ultimately transform the world.
- That's why Moses is one of our heroes.

Faith can win great victories. 11:30-34

- 11:30 The faith of Joshua caused him to use one of the most bizarre military strategies ever to defeat Jericho.
- He led the armies of Israel as they marched around the city for seven straight days.
- On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times.
- Then they blew trumpets and shouted.

- This was clearly an exercise in faith, rather than human ingenuity.
- It was done in direct obedience to God.
- The Lord gave Joshua specific instructions and he followed them to the letter.
- Obedience is the inevitable result of faith.

- 11:31 Rahab makes an unlikely hero.
- She was brought up in a pagan environment that often forced girls into prostitution at an early age as part of the family's religion.
- It was a form of sex slavery not merely condoned, but demanded, by the society and surrounding culture.
- Rahab the prostitute didn't believe the sex gods were real – and trusted the Lord instead.

- 11:31 How Rahab expressed her faith:
 - She heard of what God did.
 - She expressed her belief in the God of Israel as the one true God, thus rejecting the ungodly beliefs and practices of her upbringing.
 - She willingly chose to identify herself with Israel, God's people, in defiance of her own.
 - See Joshua 2:8-14.

- 11:31 Here are the results of Rahab's faith:
 - She and her family were all rescued when God destroyed Jericho and gave the land to Israel.
 - She married a godly man named **Salmon** (which sounds a bit fishy) and raised Boaz, a godly son.
 - Boaz, related to the godly widow Naomi, married a godly woman of Moab named Ruth.
 - Rahab thus finds her way into the ancestry of King David and, ultimately, Jesus Christ.

- 11:31 Rahab provides a counter-example to any number of excuses for not trusting Christ.
 - She didn't know much about God, His word, or His people, since she grew up in an ungodly environment, but she acted on what she heard.
 - "I am too bad to be saved!" is a common excuse. At this point in her life, Rahab had never been anything but a prostitute.
 - Rather than fear what her family would think, Rahab's first concern was *saving* her family.

- 11:32 Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah and even David, were not flawlessly strong or unfailing in their faith.
 - Samson's life, in fact, is perhaps best used only as a negative example.
 - They are not remembered here for their unbelief or disobedience, but for their faith.
 - Don't let past failures stop you from moving forward in faith right now.

Faith suffers with a goal. 11:35-38

- This section provides a contrast to what comes before.
- Some people did not experience miraculous deliverance from their trials, but were forced to walk through them – even to death.
- Why did they do it?
- 3:35 "So that they might rise again to a better life." (ESV)

- Please remember, dear Christian friends, that our hope is not only for this life.
 - See 1 Corinthians 15:19.
- We may experience suffering – and that suffering may even be the result of our faith.
 - See 1 Peter 4:12-17.

- It is not uncommon historically for attitudes or beliefs to change within a given culture.
- Many present-day Muslim countries were at one time flourishing centers of Christianity.
- Take Egypt, Turkey, and Tunisia to name a few.
- And the times are changing here.
- Back in 1997, Philip Yancey made the following observation.

“The culture war is under way. Ironically, every year the church in the United States draws closer and closer to the situation faced by the New Testament church: an embattled minority living in a pluralistic, pagan society. Christians in places like Sri Lanka, Tibet, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia have faced open hostility from their governments for years. But in the United States, with a history so congenial to the faith, we don’t like it.”

- Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*

- How are we supposed to handle this?
- Jesus has some great advice.
- Listen to it in the New Living Translation.
- It’s in Matthew 5:43-48.

Who’s next?

11:39-40

- 11:39 The promise the rabbi speaks of, that they did not receive, points to Jesus Christ.
- None of these Old Testament saints got to see Him in the flesh or hear His teaching.
- They did not know of His resurrection or atoning death.
- They could only say like Job, that they knew their Redeemer lived. (Job 19:25)
- 11:40 It was God’s perfect will that they should not be made perfect apart from us.
- So this list is incomplete.
- You and I belong here too.
- The story of our faith is still being written.
- You and I and Jesus are working together and we’re all writing it right now.
- 11:40 Dare to think for a moment what God might want to do:
- Through you by faith.
- In you by faith.
- As a result of your faith.
- Listen to what a prophet once spoke to a Jewish king in 2 Chronicles 16:9.

“Faith can operate in the life of any person who will dare to listen to God’s Word and surrender to God’s will.”

- Warren Wiersbe, *in Be Confident*

Hebrews 11:23-40 Conclusions

- Over the last few weeks, we've looked at numerous examples of faith.
- In each case God was the initiator.
- Faith is always a willing response to God.
- Biblical faith is our willing response to God, expressed inwardly by submissive trust, and outwardly by obedience.

- All of our examples had to exercise some kind of submissive trust when confronted by the word of God.
- All of them had to express their faith in some form of obedience.
- In each case, however, their faith led to different results.
- The Christian life is not an egocentric game of maximum self-fulfillment that is won by playing according to heaven's rules.
- Nor is it unthinking, habitual activity that never engages the mind. God forbid!!

- The goal of the Christian life is the fervent love of God, willingly and joyfully expressed, and growing out of an ever-deepening grasp of who He really is.
- Our faith, when properly grounded and courageously exercised, bears witness to the world around us of the faithfulness of God.

- A lost and dying world does not understand a truly biblical faith.
- One reason may be that people see so little faith in action in the church today.
- Let's determine to be men and women of obedient, biblical faith.
- We will have to be willing to exercise submissive trust in the Lord, even when that seems contrary to popular opinion.
- Remember that we will not always see positive results of our faith here in this world.
- Faith may lead to some kind of success, but that usually involves various trials, troubles and problems along the way.
- Faith requires diligent effort.
- And biblical faith entails a strong conviction and a steadfast hope regarding the hereafter.

"Faith is confidence that results in action carried out in a variety of situations by ordinary people in response to the unseen God and his promises, with various earthly outcomes but always the ultimate outcome of God's commendation and reward."

○ George H. Guthrie

- Once again, let's look at that question asked by Jesus:
- When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"
 - Luke 18:8
- No answer was ever recorded at the time.
- But we can answer that question as if Jesus were to come back today.
- If He were to come back today, would He find us to be men and women of faith?
- Are we ready to exercise an attitude of submissive trust?
- Are we willing to act in pure obedience?

Biblical faith is our willing response to God, expressed inwardly by submissive trust, and outwardly by obedience.

