

Sent: Thursday, April 06, 2017 1:01 PM

Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on "Other Examples of Faith"

"And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, or David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put armies to flight! Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment! They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword, they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy!), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground!

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect!" (Hebrews 11:32-40)

What more can I say?

Well, as we come to the close of the great chapter on "faith" in Hebrews 11, there's much that we could say, and should say, and clearly understand--particularly in the context of this closing passage in Tuesday nite's study!

The question raised, "what more shall we say," reminds us of what the Apostle John said in closing out his gospel (in John 21:25): "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written!" Although selective, John--writing through inspiration by the Holy Spirit--must have concluded that the truth revealed in his gospel was sufficient to bring anyone to faith in Jesus Christ! He had written earlier, in 20:31, that what was written, "had been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name!" The Apostle Paul would later add that this faith--this "saving faith"--comes from hearing the word of God! And that "by grace we are saved, through faith! It is a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast!" (Eph. 2:8-9)

In a similar manner, the writer of Hebrews was satisfied that what he had already written about "faith" was sufficient to convey the truth about what faith is all about; how it was modeled by the Old Testament "saints;" and how its ultimate rewards are reserved for the glorious future that God has prepared for them--and us, who by faith have received Christ!

But still more can be said of it, in retrospect!

1--Some of those great "heroes of the faith" who trusted in God were able to overcome overwhelming odds and experience "spectacular victories" and other great things--in this life! And we are encouraged by it! Whereas "others" who also placed their faith in Him--and, it could be argued, had even greater faith--suffered great affliction! Horrible things! Even martyrdom! And we are appalled! (Read again the shocking account in vs. 35b-38!) And think about all those believers all over our world today who are enduring great persecution and hardship! All of which should put to rest the misleading teachings of those who preach the "prosperity gospel"--call it "rabbit's foot theology"--in some of our churches today!

Hagner notes that "the Christian life is not depicted as triumphalist in the sense that Christians are automatically protected from persecution, suffering, hardship--indeed, from any of the ills that characterize our present era, including diseases and death! (And yet) According to the author (of Hebrews), we can be victorious in and through whatever may come our way, if by faith we keep our eyes on the glorious future that God has provided for us!"

2--The "spectacular results" experienced by those "great heroes of the faith" must be attributed not to their great faith but to the power and working of their great God! And to His sovereign plan and purpose for the world, and all mankind! The Biblical accounts of these Old Testament "saints" is replete with evidence of their glaring flaws and inability to accomplish anything on their own! And so, their success had nothing to do with the size, or even the quality, of their faith but with the size of their God! Jesus Himself said that if one has faith "the size of mustard seed he could move mountains"!

3--The most important aspect of true faith is that it "perseveres"! It continues to trust God and follow His words even in the midst of the most difficult and impossible circumstances! And regardless of the "earthly outcomes"! And it's only by God's grace that it's able to endure such hardships!

The apostle Paul said it best in II Corinthians 12:9-10: "And He (God) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness!" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me! Therefore, I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong!"

And, some of Paul's last words, written from prison, declare (in II Timothy 1:12): "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day!"

4--The most "spectacular results" will be realized by all who trust God in the world to come! Steven Coxhead wrote: "Through faith, and ultimately by way of resurrection, old covenant believers and new covenant believers alike will experience together the rewards of faith, the fullness of the blessing of eternal life!" And Paul, quoting the prophet Isaiah, in I Corinthians 2:9, speaks of things "which the eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man! All that God has prepared for those who love Him!"

And so, as believers and followers of Christ, we of all people should be able to appreciate what it means to experience, as they say, "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat"--and be able to put it all together in the context of what God has told us about this thing called faith! As revealed in the great account of Hebrews 11!

And it's because of the resurrection of Christ that we, by faith, are able to celebrate our ultimate victory even in our worst defeats!

What more can we say?

Have a great Easter break, men! Walk with the Lord and be a blessing!

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