

## **27. Faith that overcomes**

July 12, 2015

Many of us love stories of the “underdog that overcomes the odds”, because we tend to relate ourselves with underdogs though we may not readily admit that we often are the underdog.

To overcome any difficult situation, the person who is facing that big challenge has to put one’s faith in someone or something. It can be oneself or one’s own capability, or someone who inspires him to do so. A sports game is one thing, but what about people’s life? Whom are they going to trust? Whom are they going to put their faith upon?

One of my favorite Christian authors is A.W. Tozer as you can tell, because I quote his comments very often. He once said, “Nothing twists and deforms the soul more than a low or an unworthy conception of God.” I think that is true, because if you don’t understand who God is, if your view of God is warped, then it will affect you in the way that you believe in Him and in the way you live. We must have a proper understanding of the character and nature of God. Consequently, if we don’t know our God properly, we believe in a wrong deity. We don’t want to go there, do we?

For last five weeks, we’ve been studying about the people who were inducted into the Hall of Faith in chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews. As I mentioned at the beginning of the study of this chapter, the people who are listed in here are great men and women of faith in God. But at the same time, they were average normal people just like you and me with many flaws. Then, what is the difference between them and us? They LEARNED to trust the Lord. This brings three essential reminders to encourage us:

### **1) People are people – nothing more.**

No born-again Christian has super faith from the day one. Everyone in the family of God is just a plain ordinary sinner. We all start from the leveled ground. Some of us learn to trust ourselves less and learn to trust the Lord more from the Word of God and the faithfulness of our Lord.

Here is the biggest tip that I can give you for faith: They remember God’s faithfulness during the time of difficulties, whether He came through according to their prayer requests or not.

### **2) God is God – nothing less.**

Our Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He hasn’t changed since before the creation of the universe. He was the God of Noah, Abraham, and Moses who cared for them and took care of them. And He is no less involved with our lives than He was with theirs.

### **3) Miracles are miracles – nothing else.**

My other favorite Christian author C.S. Lewis defines miracles as “an interference with nature by God’s supernatural power.” It is a humanly impossible event that occurs in the natural realm, apart from natural causes, for the purpose of glorifying the Lord. As I said it before, if a miracle can be explained and duplicated by a human, it is not a miracle by God.

## A. JOSHUA AND RAHAB

*Hebrews 11:30-31* By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

40 years after the crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites finally crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, but without Moses. Because of his disobedience, he disqualified himself from entering into the land. Now Joshua took over the leadership of the 2 million people. Their first target was the high-walled and fortified city Jericho.

What made the Israelites puzzled was not attacking Jericho, rather God's attack plan. He told Joshua to have the Israelites march around the city once a day for six days, on the seventh day, march around seven times and shout. That's it. I don't think that this strategy would be included in the US Army West Point textbook. What happened? The whole wall was collapsed with the exception of the place where Rahab and her family resided.

Listen, faith is believing in spite of evidence, it's obeying in spite of consequence. Not one stone of the wall of Jericho moved until the Israelites did what they were told to do. Marching and shouting had nothing to do with the destruction of the wall, it was the Lord who showed Himself great when they obeyed Him against all odds. God is God, nothing less. A miracle of God happened, nothing else. No human intervention.

When everyone within the wall of Jericho chose to ignore what the God of Israel had done in last 40 years, Rahab chose to believe in Him. Who was this Rahab? A noble and intelligent woman? Nope, a prostitute, an unlikely person to put faith in the true God of Israel. She was saved by God's grace while the other inhabitants of the city were marked out for death.

God's grace didn't stop at saving her life and her family's lives. Later she married Salmon and gave birth to Boaz who was the great-grandfather of king David. In other words, our Lord Jesus' lineage goes back through this once-pagan-prostitute. That's the grace of God. God is God, nothing less.

## B. TRIUMPHS OF THE FAITHFUL

*Hebrews 11:32-35a* And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again.

Here is a list of the people whom we are familiar with from the Bible. Faith can operate in the life of any person who will dare to listen to God's Word and surrender to God's will.

Let's go over each one quickly to see what we can learn from them:

**1) Gideon:** He started as a total wimp and doubted God's Word to him and repeatedly asked for confirmations. But the Lord used him to destroy the Midianites and the Amalekites.

2) **Barak**: He won a resounding victory over the Canaanites. Yet in the beginning he would not go to war unless the prophetess Deborah would go into the battle with him.

Both Gideon and Barak are encouragements to us who often falter in our faith.

3) **Samson**: He had so much potential to do wonderful things from the beginning, because he was appointed by the Lord from his birth, but because of his fleshly appetites, he ruined it all. As a Nazarite, he should have dedicated himself to the Lord, but the only thing mattered to him was satisfying his own lust. Yet in the end, he trusted the Lord to help and deliver him and he was willing to live his life to defeat the enemy.

Samson is a good example of not to live a double life and expecting God to bless us.

4) **Jephthah**: The Lord used him to defeat the Ammonites according to Judges 11. He thought that he could negotiate with God by promising that he would sacrifice the first one that came out of his home to the Lord when he returned to his home after the victory. It was his only child, his daughter. Since the Lord was against human sacrifices, it is unlikely he actually sacrificed her as a burnt offering, rather dedicated her to perpetual virginity according to the law of vows in Leviticus 27. This teaches us not to presume God's will, nor should we think that we can negotiate with Him.

It is impossible to go over the example of faith of everyone here. Even the author of the Book of Hebrews stopped naming after David and Samuel. They were the great men and women of God because they continuously chose to trust the God who had been faithful and loving to them in the past. That's the key of their faith. They continuously **CHOSE TO TRUST THE LORD**.

### **C. TRAGEDIES OF THE FAITHFUL**

*Hebrews 11:35b-40 And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*

Not all the men and women of faith have experienced and will experience God's miraculous deliverance. As a matter of fact, there were more people who were tortured and died than the ones who were delivered miraculously by God.

Then, we have this honest question: Does it mean that God lost His control and battle against the evil and circumstances? No, absolutely not. For some unknown divine reasons, the Lord chose not to deliver those godly people with His miracles. Listen, it takes more faith in God to endure than it does to escape.

According to a Christian organization "the Voice of Martyr", there are more Christians being persecuted and killed in the 20th and 21st centuries than the last 1900 years combined. If you have not read "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," I highly recommend it. I also recommend you to read this book "Jesus Freaks". This book will open your eyes to the persecution of Christians around the world.

Please don't think that persecutions against Christians will not happen in America. It's been happening and will be intensified. We might even go to the point where we have to choose whether we are going to die for the name of the Lord or deny His name so that we can live cowardly in the world. The decision by the US Supreme Court a few weeks ago is one of the wide open doors of persecutions that are facing against Christianity.

*Daniel 3:17-18 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.*

Please listen carefully. If our Lord sees that it would glorify Himself to deliver His people, He would. But if He sees fit to be glorified by not delivering His people, then He will do that. It is His sovereignty. We must never conclude that the absence of God's deliverance as a lack of God's love for His people. Whether people would like to accept the fact that heaven is so much better than this meager earth or not, when the Lord allows His people to face their death, He is not deserting them, rather He is welcoming them to His heaven.

I am going to quote once more from C.S. Lewis in his book "A Grief Observed": "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. Only a real risk tests the reality of a belief."

What I am about to tell you is not to boast about my faith in God, rather I want you to challenge your faith if this kind of situation should come. When our daughter Michelle was about 14 years old, I sat her down and told her, "If someday the people who hate God put their guns on your head and demand me to denounce our Jesus or they would kill you, I will let you die, because I know where you are going. I will not denounce my God. I want you to do the same if they put a gun on my head or your mom's head."

You don't need to tell me what your answer will be for that situation, but you need to prepare your heart, your children's hearts for the future.

By the way, for those who are into the Prosperity Gospel theology which is nothing more than a heresy, they do not like to study this portion of the Book of Hebrews, because it does not jive with their heresy. According to their doctrine, Christians should not suffer, be sick, or poor. If anyone goes through those things, they do not have faith in God. That is NOT what this portion of the Bible tells us. The Lord put these faithful people in the Hall of Faith. Which one should we believe, God and His Word or a heresy that takes the Bible verses out of context so that those teachers can fleece their congregations?

#### **D. APPLICATION**

Faith in God is possible to all kinds of believers in all kinds of situations. It is not a luxury for a few super saints, rather it is a necessity for all of God's people that we may overcome difficulties on this earth.