

## Transcription of 16TS345

Hebrews 11:32c-38 "Sufferings Of The Faithful" November 30, 2016

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to Hebrews 11:32. We're actually getting to the end of this chapter. We will finish, Lord be willing, next week, spend a couple of weeks looking at a couple of topical studies that will lead us into the new year, and then our plan is the first Wednesday in January to begin the book of Joshua.

But we continue this evening with our study through Hebrews 11, which is a place we wanted to come before going into the land with Joshua, which really was a venture of faith. And Hebrews is a book that Paul wrote about standing, while facing persecution, fast in the faith. And it's a tough book to write. Here're a bunch of Jewish believers, converts to the faith in Christ; and while waiting for His return, which they believed should have already taken place, they became pretty discouraged. The Lord wasn't back. Their families had forsaken them. Rome was hinting around at death for believers, and they lived clearly close to that kind of action. And so they were discouraged, as a church, that the Lord hadn't come. Maybe you feel like that tonight. "Man, I wish the Lord would come!" And we wait, and we wait, and we wait; and the waiting just means another person gets saved today. Right? And the Lord is waiting. But some had believed that, maybe by turning away from Jesus and going back to their old way of life or just simply walking away, they could bring themselves some relief. And Paul had the difficult job of trying to convince them otherwise. It's hard when people are going through it to just convince them to stand fast. That's a hard sell sometimes. "Just trust the Lord." We would say that, and if you're on the receiving end of that, you might go, "Yeah, that's easy for you to say." But that's what he was doing to a whole group of folks, a whole set of believers.

And, for ten and a half chapters, that's what Paul did. He wrote a book about how the Old Testament spoke clearly about Jesus and the fact that He would come and that every generation has had to live by faith, and that included them as well. And from the opening chapter, where he calls Jesus God in the flesh, Paul begins to show the superiority of Jesus over everything else - over the angels, over Moses. He even uses the warning lessons from the Exodus so that they might avoid making the same mistake. He promises that, in the Messiah that is coming and has come, we would find rest. He talked about Jesus' preeminence over Aaron and the priesthood; that the priesthood of His was greater and longer, established by a

higher order and a more glorious Person. And everything that they would have had confidence in, he made sure to show them that Jesus was the One. His covenant is more glorious. It's based on His faithfulness, not ours. He takes them to the sanctuary, and he walks them through the holy of holies, and through the holy place; and he said, "Look. Look at the symbolic furniture and rites practiced here. And all of them point to Jesus." And in every turn he took these Jews - now believers in Christ - through their own history. If you ever thought that you could get through the Bible without the Old Testament, think again. You need the entire Bible. And we certainly need to teach every book, don't we?

But all of that to get to chapter 10:19, where Paul says, "Come on. Don't forsake gathering together, as the manner of some is. Apply what you know to be so." Which brought us to this chapter (chapter 11) which is really the best chapter, I think, in the Bible, probably, on faith - in terms of its definition. Three verses define faith in the beginning of the chapter. Nineteen Old Testament saints' lives exemplify it in the verses that follow, and God points out only that part of their lives that modeled this faith that Paul was calling the Hebrews to plant - that faith that waits upon God, that faith that doesn't give up when the going gets tough. Every generation, like I said, having to have to live by faith.

Well tonight, we're going to start at the end of verse 32 with the words "and the prophets," and we're going to take ourselves all the way to verse 38 - just a couple of verses away from the end of the chapter. But tonight we get a broader set of verses where the message is still faith, but the illustrations are no longer with individual names. And so, instead of individual names, we are given verses that make the point that those who live by faith can suffer; that sometimes having faith means to be delivered from the dilemmas that you face, but that other times faith means being rejected, being tortured, even being killed. And yet it is still the same pleasing faith that honors Him so that faith rests in the will of God and that, ultimately, faith is an end in itself. It trusts God no matter what.

So our next lesson in this chapter on faith will teach us that faith in God can bring miraculous deliverance or, if necessary, provide perseverance unto the end because faith is interested in God's will and in eternity, not in temporal solutions. Pretty tough things to learn, but so important.

We finished, last time, a two-week look at the men of verse 32. And if you weren't with us, it is a lesson about men who were weak in many ways in their life, and yet

in whose weaknesses (though God doesn't gloss them over in the historical account; you won't find them here; this is a recording of what you did that pleased the Lord, in faith - but that even amongst weak men) God still found faith and honored it. Six men that God used to teach us that shaky faith in ordinary lives could still accomplish great things. And it was very encouraging because it literally told us that our faults are known by the Lord, but He still loves us, and He can use us mightily; that if you excuse yourself because of your weakness that God, oftentimes, will not let you do that. He'll just say, "Come on, walk." And He uses the simple that are looking to Him. He just looks for a willing heart.

So let's start in verse 32. It says this, "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: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 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. Women received their dead raised to life again." To say saints, by faith, were delivered by trusting in God. Now notice it starts in verse 32 with the words "and the prophets who through faith." Now we don't have any individual names anymore like the nineteen we had before. This is just a general statement. And the focus here is first on the various kinds of deliverance that the prophets of God and the servants of God experience in faith; literally that the power of faith in God brought miracles to bear in the lives of those who trusted Him.

So we begin verse 33 with the words "who through faith." I want you to notice that. Not through courage, not through positive attitude, not through personality or training, not by deal making or strategy. It is our trust in God and everything that faith has been defined for us in this chapter; the same faith in God's Word and character that we've been studying all of these weeks. "Through faith," deliverance came to many lives, and the results are pretty wide, and they're pretty varied, aren't they? This is exactly the lesson we should learn - trusting in God will bring the right conclusion, but it doesn't always bring the same conclusion. There's a mistake that we make sometimes as Christians when we hear someone tell us about how the Lord has worked in their lives and that we try to mimic the results by asking the process rather than seeking to just trust the Lord - His will be done. But because we want the same conclusion, "Well, how did you pray, and where did you stand, and who prayed with you, and what time of day was it, and what did you

have for lunch?" And maybe all of that matters. Well none of that matters. Right?

By faith, "they subdued kingdoms." Now that's a very broad result of true faith, and it could be applied in most places in the Bible - to the time of the judges, to the time of the days of Joshua or David or the prophets; people that changed their culture, just one man or woman, by faith, affecting a nation; guys like Samuel or Ezekiel or Isaiah who shook the foundations of the people who were supposed to be walking with God. In faith, we are to overcome the world and the prince of this world because we belong to God's kingdom. This worldly kingdom you know is going to fail, don't you, and God's kingdom is going to succeed. By faith, subduing kingdoms is part of the life of the believer.

We read, in verse 33, by faith they "worked righteousness" or administered justice, if you will, these things that God approves of. Whenever you read the word "righteousness" in the Bible, just say to yourself, "This is what God approves of." It is the things that God sees as right. So, there were those ruling by faith in God that led to the reestablishment of things that God loved or practices that honored the Lord; individuals who, by faith, changed the way that things were done. Again, you can go to the Old Testament prophets like Elijah - against Ahab and Jezebel, changed the course of the way life was lived. Judges. Kings like Hezekiah. Hezekiah came to power in a nation that wasn't walking with God, and by the time he was done, people were reading the Scriptures, the temple was open for business, the priests were back at their jobs, the worship continued day and night. The place had absolutely changed because of one guy who, by faith, established righteousness. Nehemiah - same kind of guy. Comes into a situation where no one's worshipping God, and by the time you get to chapter 12 and 13 of the book of Nehemiah, the whole culture has turned around by the ministry of Nehemiah and Ezra and guys like that who brought the will and the ways of God to bear upon the people.

So, what does that say to us? Well, look, as Christians we need to follow their example and seek to establish righteous practices in a day of tremendous spiritual decline. We're the ones walking with God and seeking to do things God's way, the things that will please Him, while most will not. And then, hopefully and prayerfully, we will be allowed to influence others in these last days - for good, by faith.

There are those in these days who "worked righteousness," and it was always in the midst of wickedness.

By faith these, some of them, "obtained promises." Isn't it interesting that, biblically correctly, only faith will ever see you gain what God has promised? Only faith will get you to that point. You'll only be able to get what God has promised if you trust in Him because He makes things accessible through faith, not by works. So we believe God. But wasn't it James that said (James 5:10-11), "Take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." Take them as an example of sticking with it and receiving what God has promised to provide. Paul would write in this book, in chapter 6:12, "Do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises of God." Faith will do that. But that means wait. God has made promises, and I'm sure that you're waiting on some He has yet to fulfill. "When is He going to do this? When is He going to come? When is He going to deliver me? When is He going to come through?" Hang in there. Heaven is yours. Peace is yours. Victory is yours. "Obtained promises."

By faith some "stopped," verse 33 at the end, "the mouths of lions." Samson did that, didn't he, with the strength God gave him. David did that in the fields, protecting his father's flock. In fact, it taught him enough about God's power that by the time he stood before Goliath, he was able to brag to Saul, "Yeah, you know, I killed a lion with my bare hands." Well, go ahead, then, with your bad self, little David. A guy named Benaiah did it. You might not remember his story from 1 Chronicles 11. He jumped into a pit in the snow and disposed of another one of the king of the beasts, and the Lord was with him. That's more than I would want to try to do. Maybe the best example we remember of that is Daniel who, by faith with prayer, spent a night in the lions' den, and the lions left him alone. Survived it. Amazing. Being punished for disobeying the rule of law, calling on anybody but the king. He lived through it.

Look. What does that mean to me? Well, the battles I face can certainly overwhelm me, be far stronger than I in a very natural sense. I have enemies that I can't overcome, that seem to have dug in. However, by faith, God will show us His strength to do what we could never do on our own, and we can even have victory

over hungry lions, so to speak. Right? God is able. Faith does that. Faith has great power! And so does trusting in God.

By faith, verse 34, they "quenched the violence of fire." We remember Shadrach and Meshach and Abed-Nego, those three guys, who found this glorious deliverance, there in Daniel 3, when they were told that "when you hear the sound of the instruments and the worship band playing and all kinds of music, you'd better fall down on your face and worship me, or you'll be burning. We'll throw you into the fiery furnace. Who is the God that's going to deliver you from my hand?" said Nebuchadnezzar. Well, they didn't bow. They wouldn't bow. And they took a stance for the Lord, and God delivered them. In fact, they said to the king, "Well, our God is able to deliver us, but even if He doesn't," (now here's faith) "we can't go against His Word." And when the king wrapped them up and threw them in the raging fire, you remember the story there from Daniel 3, there stood a fourth person with them in their very presence. The Lord was with them even in the fire, visibly so, and their deliverance was amazing. Pulled them out of there! They didn't even smell like smoke. Imagine. Nothing touched them. What good was that? Well, read Daniel 4. It led Nebuchadnezzar, the king, to give his life to the Lord. This guy got Old-Testament saved, big time. In Daniel 4, he writes his own testimony; writes it all out in his own hand. And one day, you're going to go to heaven, and you're going to meet Nebuchadnezzar because three boys were unwilling to bow a knee to a king that threatened their very lives. By faith, they stood, they "quenched the violence of fire."

They "escaped," we read in verse 34, "the edge of the sword." I think it was David who wrote in Psalm 144:10, "Who delivers David His servant from the deadly sword," and David just understood that God had so often delivered him. I mean, you read through Elijah's ministry and Elisha. They were marvelously delivered time and again from guys that wanted to kill them - marvelous deliverance. Hezekiah is spared by the Assyrians, though they could have killed him. Gideon routes the Midianites. I mean, you can make a whole list of folks who, trusting God, found themselves escaping certain death. Faith. How powerful is faith, and how often God has stepped in to deliver us, who are trusting in Him. We're like lambs in the midst of wolves, aren't we? And yet God keeps us.

We are told in verse 34 that by faith there were many who "out of weakness were made strong." We just mentioned Gideon, and we talked about him a few weeks ago. He had so little hope to be anything in life. He saw himself as worthless. He

saw their situation as hopeless. He lamented that their past had a great God; their present and future didn't seem to have Him involved at all. And this weak man, crying out for God's help, God took forward and taught him where strength was to be found. Remember Sarah and Abraham - too old to have kids - found out of weakness they were made strong. "For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). In fact, if you read Caleb's story, his best work was done after he was 80 years old. We always write 80-year-old people off. "You're 80. Just sit down." Caleb went, "I'm 80. Give me the mountain. I've got my boys with me. We're going to take out some enemy." And you can go read his testimony there. What does Psalm 1:3 say? "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season." It doesn't matter how old you are. Just where you're planted.

It says in verse 34 that there were those who, by faith, "became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." "Became valiant" or "waxed valiant," as it says in the King James (Version) "in battle;" victory over the enemy, even when you're outnumbered, confidently going forward. You're never, by the way, in the majority in a worldly sense. The church has never, one time, been in the majority. You're always going to be the fringe group, the weirdos, the right-leaning head-in-the-clouds, trusting-in-God weirdos. That's us. I wish I had a shirt that had all that on there. I'd wear it. But with God, we're a majority, aren't we? And you can't allow the observable or obvious hindrances to you to keep you from trusting that that's true. Faith will do that. It'll give you a good view of who you're walking with and who you're serving with. The Amalekites were defeated by Moses' army (in Exodus 17) just because Moses held up his arms, and Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms, and Joshua and the men were fighting in the valley. And they won. They won! They were a bunch of meandering, wandering Jews in the wilderness. They had no clue. They hadn't fought. They'd been prisoners of war for generations. And they won because God's hand was upon them. They had victory over the enemy. I mean, the Bible is filled with those who, by faith, found out that God is able. And I like to know that because we can get easily discouraged with the world's opinion of us or the way the country's going or the lack of morality or just the minimizing of the Lord and His being set aside. He's not set aside in our lives. He's powerful in our lives. He's faithful. So we're not going to lose the battle. We're going to have victory in Him. The world won't see it, but we'll see it.

Verse 35 says, "Women received their dead raised to life again." You know, Elijah stretched himself out on a dead son for a widow who was crying out to God for his

life, and prayed for this child and picked up this boy and carried him down to his distraught mother, there in 1 Kings 17. Elisha, watching him and being an understudy to Elijah, was faced with a Shunnamite woman whose son had also died (2 Kings 4). And he was mad, and he said to the Lord, "Why didn't You tell me? I could have gone in there and prayed." But he went and, like Elijah, was used by God to bring this child back to life. The point is faith brings immeasurable power to your life. And what these Jewish believers needed to know - maybe more than ever before - was that God would keep them, and they would be overcomers; they would find victory. They weren't going to lose, they were going to win. God has power you don't know anything about. And for these Jewish saints to live under the darkening skies of Nero's impending rage and lunacy, God wanted them to know that He delights in bringing mighty triumph into the lives of those who walk with Him. You should know that, too. Rather than becoming discouraged and lamenting and, "Woe is me," and you're constantly caught up in the political life of the world, look, get caught up in the life of the Savior. He brings victory for you. It pleases Him that you trust Him, and He empowers those who look to Him. Just look at this list. Don't you want to make a list like this? God can deliver the faithful anytime He wants - Noah and his family, while the rest of mankind drowns in unbelief; Moses and Israel through the Red Sea, while a purely-dominant world power (Egypt) gets drowned in that same sea; Joshua, in Israel, going over the Jordan and beginning to fight a Canaanite bunch of people that were far stronger than the Jews would ever hope to be, and yet they didn't stand a chance when the Lord was first; Gideon, overwhelming odds - he wins; David runs from Saul and the entire governmental machinery for 7½ years and finds himself to be king, and God makes him probably the greatest king that Israel ever saw - brought Israel to heights that they hadn't known, simply by a young man who trusted Him. Weak? Yep. Sinful? Often. But God was able. So "women received their dead raised to life again." There was a deliverance. There's a power that comes with trusting God that is far beyond our capability, oftentimes, to believe or to reconcile. But look what God has done through those who trusted Him by faith. Forget the nineteen specific examples; just look at the big overall view of the kinds of things that God can bring to bear - that faith overcomes. It overcomes literally everything.

But here's the parallel truth, and it starts in the middle of verse 35 where we read these words, "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 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 - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." Here's the parallel truth to what you should know about who God is, and that is there's another side to examine because God has not promised wholesale deliverance in this life for everyone. The same faith that overcomes may also be able to bring you to a place where you have to die to maintain that pleasing character that God is looking for. Sometimes faith is just, "I'll give it all up, God. Whatever you need from me, that's going to be worth it to me." And I place my emphasis on the eternal rather than the temporal. It's not less faith. It doesn't say in here, "Others, because they had less faith, were killed and murdered and thrown off the cliff and wandered through the hills." It doesn't say because they had less faith than these guys before them, they weren't able to get fully out of the problems that they found themselves in. It doesn't say that at all. It's not less faith, it's not weaker faith; it's simply finding God's will to be something other than our original intention and request. So, you get these following verses to balance out what true and biblical and persevering faith looks like. God does great things through faith, powerful things, brings great deliverance; and sometimes just enables you to die and to stand fast, not taking compromise. So here, in the middle of verse 35, God gives us some examples of equally glorious pleasing faith that would persevere unto the end, that would keep its eye on the eternal, that would care little for the temporal losses that it would face by walking with God and saw them nothing by comparison to what awaited them. So if you want to write - what else does faith do? - faith has the power to preserve you or cause you to persevere onto the end. Verse 38 might say it best. It's a character in the heart of a man before God that makes him unworthy to the world, "of whom the world is not worthy."

So, we read in the middle of verse 35, "others were tortured." Now there's an example of faith I would not like to follow. We may have heard that faith ought to keep us from such things. That's true, and it does from time to time. But it may very well not. The truth is sometimes living by faith, following Jesus, puts you in direct line with suffering. "If the world hates you," what did Jesus say? "You know it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). What did they do to Jesus? They killed Him. What will they do to you? Maybe the same thing. Some missionaries are led by faith into the worst of situations, where difficulty is the norm, where suffering is a way of life, where death is possible every day. Just for your faith. Well, you've got to be called to go there. One of our missionary guys called me last year, and he said, "Hey, I want to go to Iraq. I want to sneak across

the border and do some studies. You want to go with me?" And without even the blink of an eye, I said, "Let me pray about that, no." All in one sentence.

(Laughing) "Let me pray about that, no." And he went. And that's where he feels like God's called him to go. And I went, "I'm not called to go there. God bless you. I'll put you on my prayer list." But if God is working, by faith, you might not be delivered. God won't leave you, God won't forsake you; you'll have an eternal home, but you may get there quicker than you had planned. And God will not always keep you from trials simply because you believe in Him. He'll deliver you through them; from them or through them. Right? God will either get you through or get you out. God doesn't always keep you from the trials that you are facing. All of the apostles, with the exception of John - who suffered (if you believe, at least, the writings from the 1<sup>st</sup> century) many physical trials, including trying to boil him in hot oil (according to the early church writers) - was murdered for their faith. "Hey, I want to live in Jesus' day. I want to be an apostle." Really? Do you? No you don't.

They died, "not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." In other words, they faced difficulty, and, rather than recanting their faith, they chose to die. Look, I don't think the American church has ever faced much physical persecution. We get made fun of, and people point out how weird we are. We're not like at the top of the society's choice, but we haven't faced much physical challenge. The early church, in the first ten persecutions under the Romans, millions (six, seven million Christians) were killed in a couple hundred years and all for one thing - they believed God; burned at the stake, thrown to the lions, lit on fire with pitch to light up the Caesars' walkways in the palace. Horrendous. Read Foxes Book of Martyrs sometime. It's not a good read. But these guys went to their graves like the boys of Daniel's day. They were unwilling to save their necks by denying their Lord. And the deliverance offered would have brought physical resurrection, so to speak. They'd have lived to speak another day. And they said, "No. We don't need to live another day. Our faith is for this life and for the next life. We want the better resurrection. We value the eternal over the temporal." And if choices had to be made, they made the right one.

On a much less stressful level, you and I are called to live for Jesus in this culture. And it can be hard, and it can be costly. It can be difficult, especially as the environment seems to grow increasingly more hostile. You can stand against sin and be called every kind of possible name in the book. You've still got to do the right

thing, don't you? "Well, what if we're not delivered?" Well, then you still do the right thing. You want to go to heaven with a smile on your face. "Lord, I did the right thing." Not with your head hung in shame. You can lose a job over it, you can lose friends over it, you can lose promotions and income. Eternity has to predominate your choices, doesn't it? And the same with these guys. They died "not accepting deliverance." They put first things first. In either event, faith would lead us to put Jesus first no matter the cost or no matter the consequence.

Verse 36 said, "Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings," cruelty, "chains and imprisonment." The word "mocked" is a word for creating or producing mental anguish; the suffering that you just can't handle it in your head. The word "scourge" means just that; whipped and beaten. They preferred suffering to compromise and release. I always am so amazed that Paul - Paul was a pretty stubborn guy, right? Type A, stubborn guy. And I love watching him just stand. But his very greatest strength could also be his greatest weakness. When the Lord wanted him to go to Europe (Acts 16), it took him months to figure out that that's where God wanted him because he tried to go everywhere else first. And it wasn't until he got to the coast, and he went, "We're out of real estate," the Lord went, "Yeah, you ready now? Let's go to Europe." But that stamina that Paul showed (Acts 14) - when you're beat up in a city and dragged outside and rocks thrown at you until they think they've killed you, and then you wake up, and you're not dead, and you go right back into the town looking for a hotel room, that's a tough guy who is really not put off very easily. But you see Paul doing that in Lystra. In Philippi (Acts 16), he and Silas took a beating simply for praying for people and preaching the gospel and the fruit that came. And they could have spoken up because they were Roman citizens. They could have said, "You can't beat Roman citizens," but they decided not to say anything. In fact, they didn't say anything until the next day that they were released, and then they said, "Hey, by the way, you beat us. We're Roman citizens. So, here, leave the church alone." And they used it as kind of a pawn over the heads of the city governments to leave the church alone, and it worked. Joseph was imprisoned for years for being faithful. Jeremiah was imprisoned for a long time, simply for being a faithful man, for speaking out for the Lord. The princes were angry with Jeremiah because he shared the gospel with people in the Old-Testament sense; and for that, they made him go to prison. Jeremiah 37:15, "For they had made that the prison" for him because of his speech. Sometimes you just get in trouble for walking with God, but you can't stop doing that, and you certainly can't hide your faith. And these folks didn't. They didn't. They would "not accept deliverance." They were, instead,

interested in the eternal things, even if that meant beating and chains and imprisonment.

And worse, verse 37, "They were stoned." Now that doesn't mean you in the 60's. This means rocks thrown at you. Israel is full of rocks. And, in history, often that became the murder weapon of choice. Zechariah, the son of the priest who brought God's Word to the people in rebellion, got stoned right by the temple (2 Chronicles 24). "Let me just take this guy out and kill him because he's telling us the truth." Jesus, when He was weeping over the city of Jerusalem, said (Matthew 23:37), "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!" He was aware of their suffering. They were faithful. Now that's extreme, according to what we've seen. But the lesson is the same. The experience is extreme. Nobody's stoning you today or tomorrow, not in this country. But true faith in God will still put eternal rewards over the cost that is short-term. Right? You've still got to live for Jesus. I don't know how you're doing that - if you're hiding your faith or not saying anything or just pretending to know. I don't know. These guys, in faith, stepped up.

Notice it says "they were sawn asunder, they were cut in two." Now, there's no biblical record of this happening to anyone. But the Haggadah, the Jewish Haggadah, has a section in it called "The Ascension of Isaiah" that tells how Isaiah was sawn in two by two false prophets of Manasseh after the death of Isaiah's friend, Hezekiah the king, and how the prophets stood by, gleefully rejoicing and laughing while Isaiah prayed to the Lord as they cut him in two - with a wooden saw. It's in the Haggadah. God mentions it here. We don't have a record of it in the Old Testament, so you're fine to set that aside, if you like. But it happened to somebody. Rather than walking away from the Lord, they took a death that was horrifying. Stoned. Cut in two. You take your pick.

They "were tempted," and then they "were slain with the sword." They were tested, their faith was put on trial, and they were killed with the sword. Many died at the end of the sword for their faith. The same faith that verse 34 said "quenched the violence of fire and helped them to escape the edge of the sword," verse 37 says they ended up on the tip of the sword. Same faith. For one, God brings life; for the other, death. Both same faith, both pleasing in His sight. Faith delivers to life, and it delivers to death.

"They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." They persevered, didn't they? With little to no gain in this life, deprived of the essentials of life - even the simplest comforts or the meager existence that came with it - they did so for His sake, they did so by faith in God, they honored the Lord, and they were mentioned by Him as God rejoicing over them.

So faith can work both ways, right? The ultimate end is you trust God for whatever. Faith brings great power - power to persevere, power to overcome, and power to stand, not accepting anything else. Powerful - the faith that God wants to work in your life.

And the irony is mentioned in the first part of verse 38, "of whom the world was not worthy." The world had rejected these they really did not deserve to have (they had an example, and they trampled it under foot), their faith so far removed from this world of selfishness and sin. And, in their poverty, they pleased God, while the world didn't want anything to do with them. I hope that the next time you hear one of these false prophets on TV telling you that if you have faith you should be rich, maybe you could tell them to read the entire Bible. Because here's a list given to us by God Himself of saints who were so set apart and filled with faith that the world wasn't worthy to contain them, and yet they were called upon to persevere and to be deprived and to die. And how could they do that? They lived by real faith in Him.

Well, look, the church needed to hear this from the pen of Paul because they were ready to give up. It was getting bad, man. We don't face what this young church faced. What's the worst that could happen to you as a Christian in this culture, really? What could they lean on you with that would really destroy you? Not anything that these folks were facing. But Paul wants to be clear and say to them, "God will see you through, or He will give you strength to stand for Him." We may not always find deliverance. The choice is up to Him. Our only obligation is to be faithful and to trust Him wherever and whatever. And that's enough for God to be pleased with. It isn't the way that, so often, faith is taught. "Well, you didn't have faith. If you had faith, you would've had this." Right? The consequence of faith. "Did you get it? Well, then, you didn't have faith." No. Faith is an end in itself. It pleases God just simply because it stands upon what God has promised. When Jesus spoke to Peter, there at the end of John 21, He said, "When you're young, you can do whatever you want with yourself. But when you're old, they're going to

stretch out your hands, and somebody's going to tie you up, and they'll carry you where you don't want to be." And He talked to him about the way that he was going to die, and everyone understood that. John wrote it as well. And when Peter turned around and saw John standing there, he said to Jesus, "What about that guy? Okay, you told me how I'm going. How's he going?" And the Lord said, "Don't you worry about it. If I want him to stick around till I come back, that's up to Me. You just be faithful." And then the word got out, "John's going to live till Jesus comes back." It's not at all what the Lord said. Or maybe Acts 12 is a good example. Herod arrested both James and Peter, same day, and it pleased the Jews who hated the church. And so he killed James, and Peter was left in prison for the weekend - through the holidays, through the religious time - so that after the Sabbath, he was going to be brought out, and Herod was going to kill Peter because he was on a roll, he thought he was doing a good thing. And Peter gets broken out of jail by an angel. It's the angel-breaking-out-of-jail deal. And you read, and you go, wait a minute. It's got to stink to be James. Peter gets this great miracle story, and off he goes. Well, God's sovereign. Both had faith. No matter if it's deliverance by faith or perseverance by faith, it's still faith, isn't it?

So here, in these verses, we get clearly from God this understanding that faith pleases the Lord, but the consequence of faith - though it can be great power - can also just be great perseverance. Stand by faith. Wait by faith. I know we would all like to be up in these upper verses, wouldn't we? Subduing kingdoms, working righteousness, obtaining promises, stopping the mouths of lions, quenching the violence of fire, escaping the edge of the sword, out of weakness made strong, valiant in battle, turning to flight the enemies, women receiving their dead to life. "Oh, that's what I want! 'Others,' no, I don't want 'others.' I just want that first part." Well, both comes with it.

Next week, we are going to finish the book. Look what we have to do - two verses. I hope you're ready. If you have time, read ahead. And then we are going to have three weeks of topical studies I think you're going to enjoy. We're going to look to focus on a new year. And then the book of Joshua will begin.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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