

Hebrews 11:35-40

Last week, as we were still working through this chapter of faith (the hall of faith), we noted there being three divisions from [verses 30-40](#). But the divisions were not based as much on the people as they were on [the outcomes](#) of the faith each group put in God.

- And last week we dealt with group 1, or those who were delivered victoriously. During that section I think many of us were encouraged by the Holy Spirit to revitalize and stretch our faith in God, His plan, and His work, done His way. I know I was.
- Yet today, as we jump in at [verse 35](#), there is a rapid transition and a different kind of encouragement for those who will put their faith in God and His plan. And because of that transition, we are going to break this verse up into two parts, without overlooking the sudden change in course.

^{35a} Women received their dead raised to life again.

I was recently watching movie with Jeanne where a little girl had the faith to heal almost anyone who was sick. Honestly part of me was burning with desire to even think about God working so powerfully today. While at the same time I was very disturbed by the way this little girl was depicted as having a power that could be drained to the point of her own demise (indicating the power was at least partially her own in healing others). It reminded me of a movie that came out in the late 90's about the idea of the stigmata (although surely having completely different intents).

- If you are unaware of that, it's a silly view found within circles of Roman Catholicism that there can be such a close intimacy with Jesus that the marks of His crucifixion mysteriously appear on your body, indicating such a person is carrying some of Jesus load in the crucifixion. The marks being things like holes in your hands of feet, scourging marks across your back, or blood on your forehead from the thorns placed upon Jesus' head.
- The reason I say this is because some seem to be so sideways in their understanding of the supernatural works God does and how. What I mean by that is some seem to believe in order for God to use someone to bring about a supernatural work, that person has to be almost more than human. They bestow onto them a kind of supernatural power of their own. [But is that what the bible says is the prerequisite of God working through you?](#) No. [The prerequisites are 1\) faith and 2\) Gods perfect will.](#)
- Now, that does indicate that those whom God will tend to bring about such miraculous events through (such as raising up children from the dead), are going to have a more intimate relationship with God. Because if you have *faith* in who He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (11:6), you are going to find that person in more intimate communion with God. But do not get me wrong- He can also use someone who has, at best, fledgling faith, because [God is limited by nothing, and He's the one doing everything.](#) It's ultimately almost nothing to do with you except your *faith* in Him. When you understand this, faith multiplies.

But also understand this. In that first group of people found in [verses 30-34](#) they were more prophets, judges, and kings (again showing us he was addressing the saints of the Old Testament). Here's why that's important. In all of the OT there are only two women recorded to have had their dead raised to life again. The first is the child of the widow of Zarephath ([1 Kings 17:17-24](#)) by Elijah the prophet. The second is the son of the Shunammite woman ([2 Kings 4:18-37](#)) by Elisha the prophet. That's it.

- And remember, the Old Testament covers a time period of around 4,000 years. Why is this important? Well, I think it sets up where we are being led now in that [death and suffering are not just part of the human experience, but a necessary part, since the fall of man \(Gen. 3\).](#)
- Let me explain another way. [1](#) I believe 100% that if God wanted to, He could have forever kept every person from ever dying. [2](#) I also believe God always does what is right (always). [3](#) I further believe that God gave us freewill that we might exercise the incredible gift to love (first to Him and then each other). And [4](#) I believe that once we utilized that free will to bring the now fallen state, that [the grace of God initiated His plan to remove the tree of life](#) (that which would never let us physically die) [so that we could leave this fallen body and state one day, to forever enter His physical presence and rest.](#) And one more thing, since I have found no one to come to Jesus apart from suffering, and therefore coming to an end of themselves, I believe that both death and suffering are not just necessary in this fallen state, but [beneficial](#) (although it be undesirable).

- You see, **1)** God could certainly stop death, and we would all be stuck in this fallen state (of our own doing) forever. And **2)** He could stop all suffering, but no one would come to Him because they would believe they had everything under control, without being accountable to anyone. **3)** Which would lead them/us to eternal separation from God who is perfectly righteous. Now there is far more to cover in this conversation of faith and suffering (which we are going to dive into more today, without covering everything that is part of this conversation). **But this is a good starting point, because death and suffering are not the ultimate enemies. 1) A disbelief in the finished work of Jesus, 2) the intervention and involvement of God in our lives, 3) and the promise of eternal life are the real issues.** Without that saving and sustaining *faith*, the enemy and your circumstances will constantly be working to take you down, making you afraid, causing you to doubt His love, His presence, His compassion, and eternal hope.

Could God raise everyone's loved ones from the dead? Yes, and as a matter of fact, He is going to. But it's only those who have put their faith in Jesus who are going to want to be raised. And the resurrection they will experience (along with everyone who has put their faith in Jesus) is far more glorious than anything so far experienced. Have you submitted yourself to that? If so, it could only happen through faith.

Which leads us into the **2nd group**. Where he now speaks to the faith of everyday people who have trusted God. And what they have in common is **they were not delivered because of faith**. Notice I did not say they were not delivered in spite of their faith in God, but rather that because of their faith they were not delivered.

Now we come to that rapid transition.

^{35b} *Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.*

I think the first question many go to in their minds is, could these believers have been delivered? I say that because the language makes it sound like the people he is speaking of here could have chosen to cry out to God and be delivered from the *torture* they underwent, but chose not to do so. And folks, **that is exactly the way the Greek says this!** They could have been delivered but rejected that because they determined that if God was allowing their intense suffering, **He was or would use it!** Let that sink in for a second, as he commends them for their faith in **not accepting deliverance** when they could have.

- This could bring up other questions, like **1)** did they know how God was using their suffering, or **2)** who was being impacted by their faith, or **3)** did they see someone starting to soften towards Jesus? I'm guessing it was extremely rare for them to know or see how God was using their suffering. And the reason I bring this up is the reality that it takes even more faith to willingly suffer so horrifically while not seeing or knowing how God is using it (and that is true of the suffering is illness, betrayal, joblessness...).
- And what we are told is they chose this path because of faith in something else they had not yet seen, which is the promised *resurrection*. This again is layer upon layer of faith, building to the receiving of the ultimate promise of eternal resurrection life with God.
- But there's one more piece here, and it's the understanding of *a better resurrection*. This really isn't a new piece in this chapter because we have already dealt with **1 Cor. 3:10-15** several times so far, which tells us of rewards in heaven. As we have come to understand, everything we have done in this life will be tried by purifying fire. And only those things done for Christ will remain. **These believers who had rejected deliverance from torture in order to submit to the will of God, for the glory of God, had something wonderful to look forward to. And in faith they accepted it willingly (is that how we are living).**

Because the threat of violence against the believer who would not deny God has **never really stopped**. And there are those, who in the face of violence, step directly into the line of fire in order to advance the kingdom **by faith!** We have lots of accounts of such people in the bible and church history.

- And there are many bold Christians out there today who willingly walk into the places where they know they will find persecution. Such as those who choose to be pastors, missionaries, and congregants in nations where this is considered a crime punishable by prison, torture and even death. And a little closer to home, we have those who will interact with others who they know are hostile to their faith (we'll come back to this) in order to share the faith.
- They are not looking for a fight, but they will not be silent in their calling, in order to avoid persecution.
- So the question for us is, **1)** is our faith so solid in Jesus, **2)** His work and will upon the earth, **3)** and the promise of not just the resurrection (which is more than enough), but of a better resurrection, **that we would choose to not be delivered, even if we didn't know how** (at this present time) **God was using our suffering?**

Then we come to the 3rd group, being those that would not have chosen to suffer but will.

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.

Now although we will hopefully never be sawn in half, as we understand by church history that Isaiah was (Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Jerome all attesting to), for the majority of Christians *mocking, destitution, affliction and torment* is becoming far harder to escape if we refuse to stay silent or deny Jesus.

- Weekly I see news stories speaking of these very things happening to Christian students, teachers, business owner, civil servants, and others who will not deny Jesus for the new cultural norms or other religious beliefs. Yet the kind of persecution that is equivalent to being sawn in half is taking place every day in our world also. In actuality, with every year we reach a new level of persecution that is greater than any time in history. Let that sink in. Persecution of Christians today is greater than any time in human history.
- So why does God allow His people to suffer so much? And how should that impact our faith? If you are a podcast watcher, you likely know this question of suffering is all over the internet as secular and other world view hosts interview believers. And I would like to start by just saying that suffering isn't just suffering. 1) It creates an awareness of our need, 2) causes us to reorder our priorities, 3) creates an inner awareness of the kind of compassion others need in their suffering, 4) makes us focus on eternity more than the current fallen state, 5) tends to draw us into conversations of real depth with God, 6) reveals real faith and where we need to grow, 7) causes us to mature... or (if we choose) can reveal the complete opposite.
- But *faith* means we get to choose. It's not predetermined for us, but a decision set before all of us.

But one day God will remove His Spirit from the earth, along with His people (2 Thes. 2:5-8), and only those who have rejected Jesus will remain (although only for a maximum of seven years). It's at that time, or shortly thereafter, that the world will come to know what it's like without the restraining power of Gods Spirit and His people.

- And it won't be the liberation they think it will bring. But rather the total opposite.
- But truly the world, which abuses the believer for standing as a restraining force against evil (because of their faith in the word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit), is *not worthy* of such men, women and children. That's not my view, but Gods!

^{38b} They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

This could actually be another group of people, but because they too did not choose to suffer and yet did, they are still in group 3. But what makes them different is that in faith they fled for their lives. And truly it takes faith to leave absolutely everything you know and have behind when God has put in your heart that it's time to go.

This is what happened as recorded in Acts 8 when the Jews left Israel because of Roman persecution.

- Now this can seem to be the opposite of those who refused deliverance and were tortured. And for that reason, I'm glad these two appear in this same section which classifies each as real *faith*. Because it reminds us that what God calls you to do might be different than what He calls someone else to do. And regardless of which way He is instructing or leading you to go, both require real faith.
- I say this because some have a tendency to condemn others for their response of faith when they have no idea what the will of God is for another. And it should remind us to just do what God tells us to do and not play the Holy Spirit for another (John 21:20-23). Because to leave when you are called to stay, or to stay when you are called to leave, is not an act of faith (see the account in 1 Kings 13).
- You and I do not need to tell someone else what God is calling them to do. We need to encourage them to hear, believe, and say yes. You go or stay where God tells you. And let your faith inspire others to hear and trust Him also.

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.

And now notice this addresses the believers from all three of these groups and throughout this chapter. And I believe it speaks of every believer of all time who would stand with Jesus in faith, and says, they did not receive the reward promised while they are here on earth. For the promise is for something better.

- For the perfection of the believer does not happen here in this perishable body, but when all who have ever believed in Jesus will be raised one day into the imperishable, incorruptible body prepared **for eternity!**
- So, although there can be some great victories in this life as Christians, we no longer live for this life but the one which is promised. And the faith we have placed in Jesus is evident by the way we live that out.

Sometimes that faith might be so small the Lord has to fan the flames to get it going, as when He brought the Egyptians to encourage the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea.

- Other times it might be so great, He has to pull us back a little, such as when Abraham was ready to offer up Isaac.
- **But in all cases God acknowledges whatever we bring. And then accredits it to our heavenly account!!!**

And when it comes to trials through faith, **1)** sometimes God choses to deliver us from the trial, showing His might and power. **2)** While other times He chooses to give us the faith to go through them with Him beside us.

- And praise the Lord when He chooses to perform a miracle to deliver us. **But we also need to praise the Lord when He chooses not to.**
- That's why I have so little tolerance for **name it and claim** it theology, for there is nothing like having someone come up and tell you that if you just had more faith you wouldn't have to struggle so much, or so and so wouldn't have died, or... And folks this stuff happens all the time from Christians who fancy themselves as the spiritual elite. It's just not biblical.
- We as Christians have faith in the One who will never let us down. But it doesn't mean that our faith will keep us from all trials, for then all those who are listed here in this chapter would have never been sick, never been persecuted, never gone through sorrows or imprisonment, and would have never died.

I often times don't understand what God is doing. But I can also say regardless of what happens, it's not our understanding that will get us through, but our *faith* in the One who does.

- He is rewriting our testimonies and has something so much better ahead for us.
- So, **1)** we will keep on praying when the answer doesn't come like we thought it should. **2)** We will keep on asking the Lord to send us when we know the assignment could end up being our last. And **3)** we will say yes to the Lord even when we don't have the details.
- Because that is real faith. And He has proven He is worth of it all.