

Hebrews 11:32-40

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome to Holy Trinity Church on this week of Thanksgiving. We are glad that you've come. I'd like to title this message, Encouraged to Endure.

Encouraged to Endure. Certainly the writer we have seen has been motivating his readers to endure.

Yet in recent chapters, even as recently as chapter 10, he has used ancient Israel's lack of faith to encourage them to press on in faith.

But with the arrival of chapter 11, he has made a turn. And he has been now for some time recalling in the written record of Israel's history, the faithful, not unfaithful remnant, in order to encourage them to endure.

And he began as far back as the beginning of time. Cain and Abel. And then moving his way through primordial history until he arrived at the patriarchs with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

[1 : 34] And then laying them down, traversed through time to Moses and the entire prophetic tradition. And so he has been sequentially working his way through ancient Israel's written record.

Calling upon the personages of the past to encourage his reader to endure. And evidently he is a preacher who is not short on material.

Notice the way our own verses begin. And what more shall I say? Preachers always seem to have more material than time.

And having arrived there, that's where he finds himself. So much, he wants to say, could and of necessity be left on the cutting floor of my study.

But if I had time, oh what more shall I say? And then with staccato-like simplicity, he rivets the reader onto the names of Gideon, Barak, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

[2 : 52] Who through faith? He's bringing them all out to encourage them. In other words, and what more shall I say in my effort to recall from the written record, the remnant whose lives are to be studied that you might have a pattern to be encouraged, and that you might endure.

Take a look. In 32 to 35, he is speaking by way of through faith what they have conquered.

Gideon. He was a war leader who with a small band. Remember, God had whittled his army from thousands down to 300 in order that God would receive the glory in the exploits of that group on the battlefield.

They went to war with pots and pans, banging them in the shadows of the trees that the enemy might be confused. What a moment of weakness.

What a moment of risk. What a moment of great faith. Barak, also one who was engaged in a time of war. Samson, and we think of his strength and the slaying of many single-handedly.

[4 : 19] Jephthah, another one battle-tested. All people used to being engaged on the field where things mattered. And then he talks of David who himself took kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, and then he goes on as if he moves even without names to the recollection of the events that would bring forth names.

They stopped the mouths of lions. They quenched the power of fire, obviously recalling men like Daniel and his three friends. Post-exilic now.

Still a remnant who endured in faith regardless of what would come. They were made strong, it says, out of weakness.

They were mighty in war. They put armies to flight. And then, as he has done throughout the chapter, this great writer of gender equality says, women received back their dead by the resurrection.

Recalling, no doubt, the Shunammite widow whose own son had died, and she took him in faith and laid him on the prophet's bed, for she had been a woman who practiced hospitality to the man of God, and she basically said, my dead son will lie on his bed until you get him and bring him to me.

[5 : 47] The man of God came, and she received her son back through faith. This great litany of what more shall I say of those who through faith conquered?

True faith takes risks. True faith tries to accomplish things. And it often does.

But notice then the text, with surprising movement, moves from through faith, those things that are conquered, to through faith, those things that endure though being conquered.

While we need to look at that, I want you to gain encouragement through this first list of individuals that as you accomplish things for God, as you take risks for Him, know this, it is done through very flawed individuals.

Let me tell you about Gideon. People like to go back to the Old Testament and refer to his fleece moment as an act of faith.

[7 : 15] If you're not familiar with Gideon, God had told him clearly what to do. But, because he doubted and lacked faith, he put out a fleece to make sure he could get some reconfirmation.

He had been told what to do. The fleece moment wasn't a faith-filled moment for Gideon. It was a moment that he stood on the precipice of failure.

For he knew he was to take action. And it took him three or four times for God to summon up enough faith for him to go forward. But God worked with him.

Gideon was a flawed individual. How about Barak? You go back and read the record on Barak. He was a weak man who wouldn't even go to war unless he had Deborah with him.

And then when they got to war, she found him still hiding in the tent. And she said, you've got to get out here because there's a great victory going to happen and you're not even on the battlefield.

[8 : 22] This is a good woman calling a weak man to get engaged. Lest the victory be given to her. He's a flawed man on the field.

What about Samson? Man who fought deep flaws in regard to lust and sexuality in his life.

How about Jephthah? Made the stupid vow that cost him the life of his own daughter. How about David? He battled sin throughout.

I think of David in the cave when he had the opportunity to take Saul's life and that first time through, he grabbed hold of the robe and cut it off in a sense saying, I'm taking hold of royalty for myself.

And then the next chapter, he's ready to kill someone that he might elevate himself lest or until Abigail comes and halts him in his path.

[9 : 30] David's flawed. Ready to do things in his own strength. Saul, he obeys the voice of Abigail, withholds operating and bringing justice for himself and God therefore strengthened a weak man to continue to walk in faith.

Saul, at the end of his life, will have his own last supper by eating the meal of a witch of Endor because the word of God had completely departed for him.

What's the difference between Saul and David? Two things. David had a good woman and David had the mercy of God who prevented him from going the way of Saul.

That's all. The difference between David and Saul is not David. The difference is the deliverance and the protecting hand of God who in mercy continued to orchestrate his life and David repents and David continually repents and though he be righteous and fall seven times he would get up and walk with God.

These people of faith are conquering things for God but they are all flawed. There's a great lesson for you and me in this.

[10 : 54] For too long people have called Hebrews 11 the Hall of Faith. The Hall of Fame is what comes to your mind. They've led us to believe that the individuals in this chapter are the outliers.

They're the ones not like us. I played basketball through college. It would be like being an ordinary Division III player and thinking that the folks in this list are all in the Hall of Fame.

Or if you like baseball you made it through Little League but these folks are the folks in Cooperstown. But that's not actually the case.

They're not so much heroes as they are ordinary humans. You've got to grasp this for this is your encouragement. They are like us.

Yes. The other day I went to Plain Air to buy some coffee. It's a good place to buy it although they take too much of your money. And so I bought a bag of coffee as a gift.

[12 : 05] I wanted something good. I wanted something great. Got it home and the bag looked beautiful. Had the little zipper on the side that resealed on its own.

I mean the packaging is well it rivals Apple in the coffee world. Then I looked underneath the bag getting ready to put it up in the shelf and when I looked I saw it and it said made by humans.

Some of the greatest stuff is made by humans. This is the hall of humans not heroes.

They are like us that they might encourage us. They are filled with flaws. They all had clay feet but they all conquered things through faith.

May they encourage you then to endure because we have a church that is lying down on the side of the road wondering whether they can pick themselves up and walk forward and get anything done for God.

[13 : 19] We have men and women who think I've failed too often. I've fallen too far. There's no way back. This list is your list. My list. Our list. This is what he wants them to know.

He wants them to be encouraged to endure by looking at ordinary men and women who are inscriptured in the written record. I don't care what you've done in this life.

The question for you today is what will you do from this day in life? Will you be encouraged to endure? Will you fall? Will you stand up? Will you go forward?

Will you give yourself to God? Will you repent? Will you say let me get something done? That's what Samson did. He knew he had fallen so far but at the end of his life he's like Lord let me get one more thing done before I get out of here.

That's the way the church ought to be. Keep your eyes up. Feet forward. Encouraged to endure through the inscriptured record of ordinary lives who walked with God.

[14 : 24] In faith though fallen. They did it. So can you. They took a risk for God.

They got something done in his name. And it appears that right there in the middle of verse 35 it's almost as if the preacher caught himself mid sentence lest people get the wrong impression on the fullness of what is faith.

True faith does not merely conquer. That's not all. Through faith there are those who remain resolute when conquered.

by all. And so it turns back here 35 to 38 some were tortured refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life.

Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. There's an element of physical torture. There's an element of relational isolation.

[15 : 33] There's an element of cultural and social imprisonment. It goes on, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with a sword, they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.

In other words, true faith conquers, but true faith remains resolute when conquered. This is important for us to know, for there is a word of faith movement in our own life that appears in so many forms and whenever you see a word of faith movement that almost necessitates that God always works things out positively for you, they have not read this chapter or write.

The bulk of this chapter is written concerning men and women who had incredible difficulty in life. And they take that little window of 32 to 35 A and throw out all the rest as though faith just gets it done and wins.

In actual fact, he's come back to his main thrust. True faith doesn't get things in this life. Doesn't always win. Doesn't always conquer.

True faith never lacks a doctrine for suffering. These verses are needed. Those great words about conquering faith are the anomaly in the chapter.

[17 : 02] They are not the norm. True faith realizes that you need encouragement to endure, not merely overcome. And make no mistake, men and women who endure, of them the world is not worthy.

worthy. Those who have promises that are not kept and yet walk on in faith are those of whom the world is not worthy.

Those who have decided that this is not your best life are those of whom the world is not worthy. then the great surprises of the text come and I wanted to leave enough time for it.

Verses 39 and 40. For having spoken in the inscripturated of record of those who through faith conquered and having filled it out lest you mishear them about those who are enduring though conquered, two great surprises come in the text.

The first is in verse 39. And all these though commended through their faith did not receive what was promised. True faith never fully grasps hold of its fullness and desire.

[18 : 39] True faith is always hopeful. True faith is always forward looking. True faith is never really believing that you're going to get it all here.

And notice they were commended through faith. They were commended. That is they had God's commendation. That's the word that actually opened up the chapter as well.

In verse 2 of 11 for by it the people of old received their commendation. verse 4 through which he was commended as righteous.

God commending him through accepting his gifts. Verse 5 now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

And now the chapter closes that all of these though commended that is though they have the stamp of divine approval. in other words God is happy with these people.

[19 : 39] They do not receive all that is promised. It's a wonderful thing to remember lest you think in all your enduring sufferings God has left you all those who are commended through faith feel as though they have not laid hold of all the greatness of the promises they took up with.

That's a surprise. But secondly and this is the most stunning verse of them all verse 40 since God has provided something better for us that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Now if you took your thumb and you put it over that word us and you read this thing a million times you would never have inserted us as part of the sentence.

It would have said since God has provided something better for them. But it says us that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Get this they must wait that is from the beginning of time there are men and women waiting for us to run our race before they are made complete.

[21 : 00] wait. These men and women are waiting. We sit here today and we think oh we're waiting for Christ to return.

Let me tell you something everyone who has died in faith is waiting for you to get there. They're still waiting. This is why in Revelation the dead saints who have been martyred say how long oh Lord they're wondering how long you have that prayer at night at the foot of your bed they've been praying that prayer some of them from nearly the beginning of time how long and the answer is not until the whole family is here think of it how can I get this to you by way of illustration the promise they are to receive is a shared one it's not a personal promise it's a shared promise it's like well we didn't have a lot of money growing up my grandma would send enough money to get every kid a sweater I'm sure at Christmas and then my parents cobbled up enough stuff to get the family gift so there was always a family gift in other words all seven kids had to share the same thing it was the greatest of gifts and the greatest of difficulties for a child

I got grandma's sweater now what do I got to share with all my siblings we were not free to unwrap that gift until all the other siblings were there to open it with us if one of the seven of us went upstairs my dad would say well wait wait wait wait wait till Robin gets back from downstairs that's what's going on in this text the woman who waited for the man of God to return that her son would be given life is waiting for your arrival people it's like attending a family reunion and trying to take the large group photo but you know how this works if you have a family of large size let me tell you how it works there's always some uncle some aunt some nephew someone who's not around when we've all been told to be around for the picture and invariably everyone's gathered and the photographer's ready and somebody says up hold on cousin so and so took her little baby into the other room to change the diaper we're going to have to wait till they get back to take the photo and 50 60 people are waiting on that little one to get it done so that we can have our photo and everyone says oh we can photoshop them in but you know that doesn't work no one ever does and so we wait or you end up taking the picture even when you know you have family members that are not there and guess what you do with that picture you never pull that one out again why because even when you took it you knew it wasn't going to mean anything to you because not everyone was present you're not showing that picture off you're showing that picture off when you got all your kids if they all weren't there

I wouldn't keep it in my Bible that's what this verse is saying since God has provided something better for us that is we get the same promises and apart from us they are not yet full or fulfilled or complete this week Thanksgiving dinner table is going to be set there may be just a few sentimental ones among us but the older you get the less sentimental you get or at least you should get because life experiences teach you that the table is never really full you might want it to be full you might think it should be full but it's never really full when I was a young man I'd go to the Thanksgiving table and there were those eating with us who are now dead and gone what makes me think it will be full without them!

I might think it's full if I just have my own children there but even one or two of those are now gone somewhere else and even if they were all there their kids aren't there yet their grandkids aren't there yet and long after I'm gone and in the ground there'll be another family waiting on that dinner too that's what's happening here God has a plan for all of time to gather up a family for himself around the table now let me say this another way no one is free to cut into the turkey this week until what until the host has been seated now some of you need to learn the etiquette of this to begin with at any kind of meal because people start serving plates out and you start eating long before everybody sat down but etiquette not be eating until the host has been seated and the host picks up the fork and the knife and carves and says let's begin why because the one who's provided the meal should at least have the respect of the participants who are at the table let her get the apron off before you start downing those mashed potatoes let me put it another way do you realize that there's a wedding supper of the lamb get this the host is already there

[27 : 26] Jesus is already there and a lot of the party has already arrived all through time they've been coming in the front door and the smells in the kitchen all sound ready when are we eating not yet why aren't we eating they're not all here yet and all these ancient saints inscripturated in the written record are peering out the window waiting on us until they are complete and not only them but our Lord the host waits waits for us!

If you can't catch that then you can't catch! They're calling us home they're encouraging us to faith they're wanting you to endure they're waiting for the day when the buzzer rings and they say who's there?

The helms are here come on in and they all turn to the host is this it? Nah we got more coming all through time I don't know how long time's going to go but they're waiting for your arrival they finished they're ready let me close with this recently my uncle told me a story that I had never heard him tell before it was early 1970s probably 71 or 72 he was serving our country in the Vietnam War he was in North Vietnam and it was about 2 3 in the morning and they had gone out and laid an ambush line it was like a V triangle and they had two ends that were the the flanks my uncle was a medic so they put the medic in the middle because once the thing hit in the morning once the light came and it all went the medic would have to be able to go anywhere and there was a guy all of a sudden 3 in the morning nobody making a sound and the guy next to him with the ham radio says hey doc they called him doc because he was the medic doc you got anybody in the world you want to call is there anyone in the world you want to call the world meant anyone at home anyone who wasn't there it was the known world it was on the eve of my mother's birthday now my uncle stayed with us growing up lived with us the only number he knew by heart it was a ham radio and you had to have the number by heart it was something followed by 0530 and this guy on a ham radio in the early 70s in the marsh of north vietnam rings up a house in the suburb of chicago and my uncle gets on the phone and says andrea that's my mom's name happy birthday it's uncle stan stan where are you i can't talk long happy birthday my mom says see you at christmas hangs up he tells me he held those words in life and in death that's what's going on in the text let me put it this way as you are suffering walking waiting is there anyone in the world you want to call the writer to the hebrews has given you a direct line to a host of people who are already home and this chapter is saying to you see you at christmas that's what's happening do you get it can you believe it from the beginning of time they're waiting for us are you kidding me waiting for us us us because the gift is shared the promise is ours

be encouraged endure our heavenly father we thank you for this splendid chapter and ask that we would add the fidelity of our own lives to it give us things to conquer and when we don't help us to endure when conquered give us commendation give us a collective will to live with vibrant faith until we gather ourselves to your ever enlarging eternal family in christ's name amen amen