

A faith that endures

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Date: 24 August 2025

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[0 : 00] So there are actually two readings today. So the first one is just a page earlier. So turn to page 1210. And the first reading is Hebrews chapter 10, 32 to 36. And then we'll change to chapter 11, verse 32 to 40 after that on the next page.

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

Now we'll change to chapter 11, verses 32 to 40. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

[1 : 56] Women received back their dead by resurrection. 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. They were stoned. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with the sword.

They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Thank you, Robbie. Well, good morning. My name is Barry Gillum, and I am a member of the church family here at Grace Church Dulwich. Shall we just commit this service to God in prayer?

[3 : 02] Father, we thank you that we're here this morning, and we do pray, as we look at your word together, that you would speak to us, that you would touch every heart, that you would encourage those of us who are finding the way weary, that you would challenge us, and that you would inspire us.

And we pray that you would receive all the glory for what's said and done. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, friends, over the summer on Sunday mornings, we have been journeying through this 11th chapter of Hebrews.

And after five sermons on the subject of faith, we have finally arrived at this last passage of Scripture in this chapter, which will be what we're considering this morning, verses 32 to 40.

On the basis that some, if not many, would have been away during the series, it would be time well spent, I think, if we took a few minutes reminding ourselves of the context and the author's purpose in writing to the Hebrews.

As this will enable us to understand the chapter more accurately and apply the message to ourselves in the context and culture that we are living in today.

[4 : 26] Well, Hebrews, well, the title of the book tells us that the epistle was written primarily to those Jews who had left Judaism and converted to following Christ and the Christian faith.

This helps us to understand the author's many illustrations and individuals from Jewish history as recorded in the Old Testament.

People often mentioned by name only with no expansion or explanation of what they did, perhaps because it wasn't necessary. As we can see, this is the case in our first verse, verse 32.

We have a list of names. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel. Robbie read to us from chapter 10, those verses 32 onwards.

And we read that the original readers of Hebrews previously had endured costly persecution and through it had stayed loyal to Christ through a hard struggle, publicly suffering loss, humiliation, and affliction.

[5 : 43] And they endured this because of their faith in Christ and the promise of a better life. But now their faith was flagging.

And sadly, we read in chapter 2 that they were being tempted to drift away. In chapter 3, it says that they were falling away.

In chapter 4, we read that their hearts were hardened in disobedience to God. In chapter 6, they were becoming sluggish in their faith.

And there in chapter 10, verse 35, ultimately, they were in danger of throwing away their confidence in the gospel promise.

And so Hebrews calls weary Christians then and now to persevere, to stay calm, keep going in Christ.

[6 : 44] The writer's aim is to challenge, inspire, and encourage the readers, including us. And he does this in two ways.

Firstly, in chapters 1 to 10, Jesus is elevated over everyone and everything that has gone before. Christ alone is supreme and sufficient for salvation and life.

Jesus plus nothing is everything. In chapters 1 to 2, we read that Jesus is superior than the angels and the Torah.

In chapters 3 to 4, he is superior to Moses and the promised land. In chapters 5 to 7, he is superior to the priests, even Melchizedek.

And in chapters 8 to 10, he is superior to the temple and the sacrifices. Secondly, the author, in his attempt to challenge us and inspire us and encourage us in our faith and the Hebrews, he explains what faith is.

[8 : 01] In verse 1 of chapter 11, we read that, And to strengthen this, the writer points to the lives of Old Testament saints who by faith in God and his promises overcame hardship.

They were prepared to suffer loss, endure suffering, escaping death, and receive deliverance, as we saw last week.

In verse 28 of chapter 11, we read of the Passover, and we are reminded how that those firstborn of the Hebrews who were inside the house underneath the blood that was put over the doorposts were safe, whereas the children firstborn of the Egyptians were not.

In verse 29, the crossing of the Red Sea, how that delivered the Israelites as they fled Egypt, but consumed the Egyptians as they followed.

Verse 30, the walls of Jericho. Verse 31, the saving of Rahab from certain death. But now the author mentions another aspect of faith, And that's God's people accomplishing mighty deeds for him.

[9 : 27] And that brings us to our first point in today's message. It's on the back of the service sheet and it's on the screen. And that is that faith enables God's people to do amazing things.

And that's verses 32 to 35a. We start with a list of names. Four judges, Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah.

One king, David, and then Samuel and the prophets. All of these key characters are found in the books of Judges and 2 Samuel.

Now in echoing the author's sentiment here in our first verse, verse 32, time would fail us to consider those characters in any great detail.

It reminds me of the story of a lady who took her young nephew to church for the first time. And the minister came out of the vestry and got into the pulpit.

[10 : 37] And the young boy said, What does that mean, aunt? And she said, It means that the service is going to begin. And then the minister opened the Bible and he said, What does that mean, aunt?

And she said, That means we're going to read from God's word. And then he opened up the hymn book and the young boy said, Aunt, what does that mean? And she said, That means that we're going to stand and sing.

And just before the preaching of the word, the minister took off his watch, he looked at the time, and he placed it on the lectern. And the young boy said, Aunt, what does that mean?

And the aunt said, Absolutely nothing. So I'm putting my watch back on, because I'm pretty sure I'll be okay today. But time would fail us this morning to consider these characters in detail.

But I would recommend that you do. During my preparation for this, it was good to refresh the memory of these individuals and what the work that God called them to.

[11:39] But we're given a summary here of the amazing things that these people and others accomplished through faith in verses 33 to 35.

We read that they conquered kingdoms, referring doubtless to the countless military victories in the lives of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and David.

They enforced justice. This was the top job of the judges, particularly Samuel. They obtained promises. God had promised to give Israel the land of her enemies, and in the case of David, kingship and a perpetual dynasty.

They stopped the mouths of lions. This was done by Samson in Judges 14, by David in 1 Samuel 17, and of course Daniel in the den of lions.

They quenched the power of fire, likely to be a reference to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were in the fiery furnace. They escaped the edge of the sword.

[12:52] They became mighty in war. They put foreign armies to flight. Again, a reference to Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and David. Women received their dead by resurrection, referring to the miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha, which we can read in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4.

Now, if you were following me through that list, which we moved through fairly quickly, you may have noticed that I missed out the statement in verse 34. They were made strong out of weakness. And I did that to draw your attention to what I believe is the main emphasis of these verses. These key characters could not have achieved what they did in their own strength and wisdom.

These men were flawed, weak, vulnerable, and sinful. Gideon was a man who hid in caves in fear of God's enemies.

Barak was a reluctant, fearful general who wouldn't go into battle without Deborah, the prophetess, being at his side. Samson, the strongest man that ever lived, weakened through fleshly lusts.

[14:20] Jephthah, an outcast of his own society. David, a man after God's own heart, but capable of the gravest of sins, the taking of Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah and Samuel, who didn't raise his boys correctly.

Now, this should be tremendously encouraging to us this morning. When we become conscious of our own weaknesses, our failings, and our inadequacies, in a task that perhaps God wants us to do, we should remember that our strength for that task comes from the Lord.

It is God working through us that is what we need to remember. God says in Zechariah chapter 4, that it's not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.

It is when we say, God, I can't. He says, I know, but I can. When we say, God, it's impossible, he says, with me, all things are possible.

And this is where faith comes in. Do we really believe that? Are we prepared to act upon that? Faith is a life that looks to God, that loves God, and lives for God.

[16:02] Mary Slessor, a Scottish missionary who I learned something about recently when we went to Keswick, she was called to the mission field in Kalabar, Nigeria.

This was at the end of the 19th century. And she said this, Lord, the task is impossible for me, but not for thee.

Lead the way, and I will follow. A life of faith. And she took the gospel to that part of Nigeria, and many were saved, and she saved the lives of hundreds of Nigerian children who otherwise would have been put to death.

In 1934, in Charlotte, North Carolina, there was an evangelistic meeting being held in a tent. The evangelist was Mordi K.I. Ham.

Two young boys, 14-year-olds, went along to that tent meeting one night. And when they got inside, there was nowhere for them to sit. So they decided to leave.

[17:16] And Usher went after those two boys and said, boys, come back. I will find you somewhere to sit. And he did. And that night, those two boys were converted to Christ.

One of those was Billy Graham. A man who has preached the gospel globally to more people than anyone else. The faith of one man.

Not Mordí K.I. Ham. Not Billy Graham. But the unknown Usher. A member of the welcoming committee, if you will.

Who went after those two boys. Because he knew that what those boys needed to hear more than anything else was the gospel of Christ. And he had faith in that gospel that it could transform and change lives.

Friends, we have the power of God in the word of God in the gospel of Christ. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It can pierce the hardest of hearts.

[18 : 25] It can bend the stiffest of necks and change and transform lives forever. But do we have the faith to act upon that? We are part of God's mission.

This brings me to our second point. That faith enables God's people to endure suffering. After the amazing list of deeds of God's people, we are confronted with another list, a list of sufferings. And that's from verse 35b to verse 38. We read of torture, of mocking, flogging, imprisonment, chains, being stoned, sawn in two, killed with the sword, destitute, mistreated, homeless wanderers. Well, I don't know what you think, but that's not a great advert for the Christian life, is it? If our message to people was this, don't bother with all the pleasures of the world, follow Jesus and have a life of persecution, poverty, and loneliness instead, well, humanly speaking, no one would ever sign up for that.

which is exactly why it is a mark of faith. It is people of faith who value and love Jesus more than anything and who are willing to suffer in this way.

[20 : 04] Is that true of us? As followers of Jesus, God does not promise us that we will have health and wealth and become successful and rich.

If that was the message, there'd be a queue of people outside the doors of this place every Sunday wanting to come in. Sadly, in some evangelical churches, a false gospel is being preached.

The prosperity gospel, the name it and claim it gospel, teaching that if you follow Jesus, your life will be better in earthly ways.

Of course, it is better to follow Jesus, but that does not mean bigger bank accounts or more popularity. For your faith could be hated, persecuted, and even imprisoned for it.

And Jesus tells us no less. In fact, our passage this morning states the opposite to health and wealth.

[21 : 23] In verse 39, it says that though commended for their faith, they did not receive what was promised. Not that God failed them, but what was promised was the distant future, which they themselves failed to see.

And yet, even without seeing those things, they still believed that God would do them. It's an oft-repeated theme throughout the New Testament, suffer now, glory later.

In the New Covenant, God has provided something better for us. Look at verse 40. We have the privilege of living in a time when many of the Old Testament promises have been fulfilled in Christ. Even so, that does not mean that we should expect our fullest life now. Even New Testament saints should expect hardships and persecutions until Christ returns.

And by faith, we must endure and keep going to the end. I think the Apostle Paul sums up the life of faith mindset in his epistle to the Philippians and chapter three.

[22 : 57] This is what he says. But what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but done, that I may win Christ.

But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, which means saved, be thus minded. Friends, if you follow God, you do not get it all now.

In Christ, you do get it all, but you get it all on that final day when Christ looks at you and says, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

God, until that day, we need to stay calm, keep going in Christ, and by faith, we need to look to God, love God, and live for God.

[24 : 46] And in Jesus' name, may that be the case. Amen. Amen.