



THE PINNACLE OF FAITH

“30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. 32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: 33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: 36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: 37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

- Hebrews 11:30-40

The Pinnacle of Faith

The Spirit of God wants us to recognize—and all men, for that matter, to recognize—the tremendous importance of a total kind of faith. Faith is really defined as simply trusting completely in what God says with no conditions. It is unconditional trust in what God says strictly on the basis that He said it. Now, that is what faith really amounts to. And every man lives his life either doing that or not doing it. Every man leads his life either believing in what God says and betting his life on it or in betting his life on his own attitudes, on his own intellect, on his own understanding. Those are the only two options.

But the faith that He is talking about in this chapter is that faith which takes the bare Word of God—now mark this—the bare Word of God and acting on it simply because it is the Word of God, stakes its life. True faith doesn't need to ask any questions; it is simply believing what God said because He's God, and He said it without any explanation at all.

In fact, where you have true trust, you don't need explanations. That which looks for signs and wonders and explanations is not faith; its doubt looking around to see if it can find some proof. And since God and the system are opposites, faith means breaking with the system. And so, consequently, to believe God is often to do that which is unreasonable and illogical. And certainly, different than what the world would dictate.

Yet faith willingly obeys. Now, we've seen it all the way through this chapter. For these Jews, to whom He wrote, the natural thing was to hang onto Judaism. The reasonable thing was to hold onto Judaism because the break was so complete and so treacherous, and they would lose their friends and their families, and they would lose their social status, and they would be at a loss in many dimensions. And so, the obvious thing to do was to hang onto Judaism. Even for those who really believed in Christ, to hold onto some of the trappings, just so the break wasn't so obvious that you sacrificed a lot.

So, the reasonable thing wasn't to commit yourself to God totally, but to just get in a little bit, get your feet wet, and hang onto Judaism. But all through the chapter, the Holy Spirit is

saying faith means God says it; I do it wholeheartedly and totally. And we saw that with Abel.

Abel, the first illustration of faith in the chapter, didn't ask God any questions; he didn't ask for any reasons. God said, "Make a sacrifice," and he did it.

And then we saw Enoch. Enoch didn't question God. God said to Enoch, "Separate yourself from the world and walk with me," and he did it.

And then we saw Noah, and Noah didn't question God. He obeyed, though it seemed totally bizarre to spend 120 years building a boat in the desert. God told him to do it. He suffered the mockery of his contemporaries for all those years, and he never saw any rain, but he believed it would rain. Why? Did God have a black cloud hanging over his head for 120 years? No. He believed it because God said it, and that was all he needed.

We saw Abraham. He believed God. God said, "Get up and get out of here and go to a land I'll show thee, and I'm not even going to tell you where it is. And you're going to get a promise that you'll never receive." And he got up and went. Why? Because God told him to go. And he never asked God a question; he just obeyed.

And then we saw Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. And in each case, the natural course of events would lead a certain way, and God gave them instruction to violate the natural course of event, and never for a moment did they hesitate to believe it.

And then we saw Moses. And everything in Moses' life said, "Hang onto Egypt. Hang onto the pleasure, the plenty, and everything else you've got." And God said, "Break with it; go down and lead my people Israel," and He never had a second question. He immediately did what God said.

You say, "Why? Why did they so commit themselves to God? Why did they so believe God?"

It boils down to this, people; they had a right view of who God is. A life of faith is based on proper theology. It may be difficult to do what God says, it may be strange; it may be bizarre;

it may cause certain suffering; it may mean separation from the world and even from people you love. It may cost all the ambitions and dreams of your life; it may even cost you your life, but to obey God because God said it is what faith is really all about.

Faith, then, is simply and only based on a person's attitude toward God. That's like J. B. Phillips wrote in his book *Your God Is Too Small*. If you've got a little, tiny god, don't trust him, because he's not verified in your mind. People who don't trust God have the wrong god. People who really know who God is have no reason to do anything but trust Him totally. And the reason these people trusted Him was because they had the right view of who He was.

Moses serves as the illustration, the end of verse 27. Why did Moses do what he did? "He endured as seeing"—what?—"Him who is invisible." He focused on God, who God was, and the character of God. And therefore, when he had a God that was great enough, he didn't have any problem doing what that God wanted him to do, because he knew God would keep His promise. The bigger your God, the more you trust Him. Simple principle.

And these heroes of the faith had such lofty, exalted knowledge of God; they saw Him as a sovereign, loving, covenant-keeping, faithful God. They took Him at His word. They banked their life on it, though it was strange, though it was out of the ordinary, though it cross-grained everything they knew in the natural. They did it simply because God said it without any explanations.

Now, that's exactly what the Holy Spirit wants these people who are reading the book of Hebrews for the first time to do. Now remember that all the books of the New Testament are written to somebody in particular, and this one was written to a colony of Jews, and they were being really presented with the New Covenant. Some of them were believers; some of them were intellectually assenting to the gospel but had never committed themselves to Christ.

And this, too, kind of a combination of two groups, was being really pinpointed by the writer of Hebrews to come all the way to Christ, to totally believe Him, and to let go of all the old stuff, to abandon themselves to what God said. They were trying to hold the best of two worlds; they really didn't trust Him. It's like taking your boat out, you know, on a stormy sea, but making sure that you never untie it from the dock.

Some years before the letter was written—the letter to the Hebrews—the gospel of Christ was presented to this colony of Jews somewhere outside Jerusalem, and it was presented to them, chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, tells us, by a group of the apostles, those who had heard Christ, or some disciples. They had heard the gospel. Some of them had accepted Christ and really and truly believed they were really born again. But they found themselves holding onto some of the old patterns, some of the old customs. And they found themselves having a hard time breaking with the temple, particularly, in Jerusalem, and the priesthood.

But there were others, in the group, who intellectually agreed that Christianity was true, and that Christ was Messiah, and they got right up to the edge of it, and they had all this revelation, even with signs and wonders and diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. But they never came over to Christ. They just hung in the balance. And the infant baby faith of the saved ones was really kind of floundering. And the emerging faith of the not-yet-saved ones was in danger of dissipating altogether, and they were going to go back to Judaism and become apostates.

And so, all the way through the book of Hebrews, the writer keeps saying, “Come on; come on; come on; let us come on to Christ. Let us enter in boldly into the Holies. Christ has made the way of access. Come on. Don't stop now; put your total faith in Him. The Old Covenant is over with; cut it off. Cut the cord.” And you have to believe God to do that. You'd have to trust in the New Covenant, to sever every relationship, wouldn't you? To cut the line that ties you to the doc and go out on the sea and believe that God says, “I'll take care of your little boat.”

And so, He's calling for full faith. In chapter 11 He then defines what full faith is. It's that commodity which allows a man, because he believes so strongly in a powerful God to cut himself off from everything in his life to obey what that God tells him to do, no matter what the apparent circumstances and conditions might be. And these guys all did. They all believed God to the point where they cut off the cord from whatever it was that they were used to doing and obeyed God.

Now, the intellectually convinced individuals who weren't yet saved were in terrific danger. Look at chapter 10, verse 38, “Now the just shall live by faith”—he says— “but if anybody goes backwards, anybody draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”

He's saying to the intellectually convinced, “Don't fall away; don't fall backwards now that you've come this close to being redeemed.”

On the other side of the chapter, the beginning—and incidentally, that's right at the end of chapter 10, and then He launches into faith. On the other side of the faith chapter comes verse 1 and 2 of chapter 12. And here He talks to the saved ones. The first passage, the intellectually convinced; the second one, the saved ones. And He says, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses”—so many who illustrate to us the life of faith—“let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us”—and the sin there, as well as being a very practical statement of sin in any Christian's life, was probably the sin of hanging on—hanging on to old patterns in Judaism, and not really coming in full faith—“let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto”—what?—“Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

In other words, He says, “Drop that old thing; focus on Christ and come all the way and run the race.” So, on one side He warns the intellectually convinced not to fall back; on the other side of chapter 11, He speaks to the saved and says, “Come on, cut the cord and run the race with patience.” And in the middle comes the great chapter on faith. So, it really applies to either group. It is a chapter presenting to us the virtues of faith.

Now, we've seen a lot about faith in this chapter. Primarily—and keep it in your mind, if you never get anything else get this—your faith, your trust is based on your view of God. If you've got a little god, you're not going to trust him. And so, if you want more faith, you get into the Bible, find out what kind of a God you have, and that'll increase your faith.

All right, now, we've learned a lot about faith in this chapter. We've seen the life of faith, the walk of faith, the work of faith, the pattern of faith, the victory of faith, the choices of faith. I don't think I left any of them out. And now we come, in verse 30, to the pinnacle of everything—are you ready for this—the courage of faith. The courage of faith.

Now, the true test of faith is courage. You know, fair-weather faith is, you know, OK. But it's the faith that is exhibited in the face of disaster and trial and trouble. That really proves the legitimacy of it.

Now, I want to show you three things in this passage, and there's so many exciting things here. This is just going to thrill you, I'm sure, as it did me in study. And it's like the iceberg; you're going to get the top of it, not the whole thing. But true faith, at its high point, is courageous. Real faith has courage. You know, we read about people, you know, who exhibit fantastic courage in the cause of Christ: missionaries and so forth and so forth, and bold people, and we see the apostle Paul and others like that. And we say, "Man, courage, well, that's all based on faith. They so trusted God that they never feared anything."

Now, faith at its highest point has the courage to do three things: to conquer in struggle, to continue in suffering, and to count on salvation. To conquer in struggle, to continue in suffering, and to count on salvation. Faith at its high point has the courage to do that.

First of all, really pinnacle faith, faith at its apex has the courage to conquer in struggle. Now, life is always a struggle for the believer. And the only thing we really have to meet struggle is faith, to believe God. And we've talked so much about this, but I know the Spirit of God has brought this message to our hearts for tonight. And so, I hesitate not to say it again.

Now, the faith that we have in God is the only thing we have to challenge the trouble and the struggle that faces us. In order to illustrate that, He begins with a discussion of Jericho in verse 30. And all the way through verse 35, at least the first part of it, we see the conquering of faith in the face of struggle. Look at verse 30, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down"—now it wasn't the walls that had faith; we know that. It was the people. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." Now, the walls there—*teíchos* in the Greek, has to do with the outer wall, the massive outer wall—sometimes so wide you could run a couple of chariots side by side down the wall. Those are big walls. I'm not talking about a picket fence. Big walls. And up to this point, the writer has been citing, you know, great examples of faith, one after another after another, and the great men of time before the Flood and after the Flood and up to Moses. And now He's moving into the Promised Land. It's a chronological run through the eleventh chapter. And He moves into the land, and the first thing they faced when they got into the land was what? Jericho. And

Jericho was a frontier fortress, set up by the Canaanites to defend their land. It was just across the Jordan River. And it's a deserted area; let me tell you. We were there when we went to Israel, and it is bleak. And this city was set up as a fortress in the bleakest part, down in southern part of Israel. From people coming across the Jordan River, they would be stopped immediately by this massive fortress known as Jericho.

It's interesting, just a footnote— isn't it interesting to you—it is to me—that nothing happens between verses 29 and 30? You know that there are 40 years of history in there? What did the children of Israel do for 40 years? From the time Moses led them out, till Joshua led them in, they mumbled and grumbled and griped and complained and fooled around in the wilderness not in faith but in—what?—unbelief. And consequently, there is nothing out of that whole 40-year period to even include in a chapter on faith.

But finally, as they enter the land, we find faith again exhibited. Now, the account of the fall of the walls of Jericho is in Joshua chapter 6, but we're not going to turn to it for the sake of time. The land, having been entered, the land of promise, Canaan, after hundreds and hundreds of years—at least 400 or more since the time of the captivity in Egypt. They had waited a long time, and now they had arrived. And they had gotten a lousy report from the spies who came back and said, “Forget it; there's no way. Those people are like giants, and we're like grasshoppers, and we can't handle it.” And they came back with this terrible, discouraging thing, after hundreds of years of waiting, 40 years roaming around the desert, and they got a report like that.

Moses, their great leader, was dead, and it looked kind of sad. But Joshua, the new leader, took over. And under Joshua, they went across the Jordan River, came face to face with Jericho. Now, this was their first obstacle. And the courage of their faith was immediately tested. God said, “I'll give you the land.” And you can imagine some guy getting up there, looking at Jericho, and saying, “Give me the land, give me the land, mmm-mmm-mmm. You know, we can sure believe that. Here we are, no army, no nothing.”

This is a band of slaves that have been roaming around the desert for 40 years, aren't organized enough to knock off the Cub Scouts, and they run up against a place like this. It was walled; it was barred; it was fortified; and it seemed like an impossible task. And the spies came back, in Deuteronomy 1:28, and said, “The people are greater and taller than we;

the cities are great and walled up to heaven”—they were prone to exaggeration. But Jericho was the gateway to the land, so they had to have it. And you know what? It fell. And it didn't fall to battle, it fell to faith.

Do you remember what God told them to do? He says, “Here’s the battle plan.” And you can imagine all of the warrior types—you know?—been working out for several days before the orders came, really ready to go. And the Lord says, “Here’s what you do. Y'all line up, put the priest out in front and the guys with the rams’ horns, and you walk around the city once every day and then go back to wherever you're going to camp. And you do those six days in a row. Then on the seventh day you walk around seven times. At the end of the seventh time, blow the horns, everybody yells, and the walls will fall down.”

And you know what the reaction must have been: mumbling and grumbling through the camp. “Are they kidding?” You know, it took terrific faith to do that. First it was embarrassing. Secondly, what was the guarantee that they weren't going to shoot them from the top of the wall or drop rocks on them? It appeared absolutely ridiculous. And just if you think it was tough getting the first day going, imagine what I must have been about the fifth and sixth day.

But they did it, and they obeyed. And, you know, it's interesting. I love to see the characteristics of God in everything in Scripture. God delights in slaying the pride of men. Did you know that? He just delights in it. I mean He slayed the pride of the city of Jericho by making the collapse of their city in the most foolish possible way. He sent a little boy to knock off Goliath and send the Philistines running. And here He take all the wind out of the sails of the people of Israel who thought they might be strong enough to knock off Jericho, and there may have been a few, and He just says, “You walk around, and I’ll knock it over Myself.” It was like a paper house to God.

Here they were, naked in the desert, sandwiched between the Jordan River and the city of Jericho. They had nowhere to go. When they crossed the Jordan, they burned all their bridges behind them. They were cut off from escape. They had no homes to retreat to. They had no fortress for defense. They had to live on faith. The only way to go was forward, though there was an obstacle there that looked so massive there was no hope. But they believed God; they went there; they marched around and around and around. And finally, the seventh time, on

the seventh day, it took great faith to yell, I'll tell you that. By that time, I'd of been hiding my head. But they did; they yelled at the top of their voice, and the whole thing fell over. And that's how faith operates. Faith conquers the obstacles because it believes God. When God says, "I'll do it this way," faith says, "That's right; You said it; You'll do it." That's faith.

There are four degrees of faith. I'll just give them to you; it's another sermon. There's faith which receives; that's when an empty-handed beggar comes to Jesus Christ and takes salvation. There's faith which reckons; that's the faith that counts on God to undertake for us. There's faith which risks; that's the kind of faith you saw here, and that's the kind of faith that moves out to dare something for God that's impossible. And then there's the faith which rests; that's the faith that in the middle of pain and suffering just sits back in confidence that God will deliver.

Now, here we see the faith which risks. And they were willing to risk everything because they believed God. Obedient faith. And they all shouted, and it came to pass. Oh, faith is a great thing, no matter what the obstacle.

In Mark 11:24, the Bible says, "What things you desire, when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and you shall."

There's a great story from the missionary Moffat. He labored for many years among the Bechuanas, and he never saw one single convert year after year after year. Some people in England who loved him wrote him a letter and said they wanted to send him a present. And they said, "What present would you like?"

And he wrote back the letter, and he said, "I'd like a communion set."

And they were shocked because there wasn't anybody to have communion. Months later, the communion set arrived, and there were more than a dozen converted natives who sat down and shared with him the first Lord's Supper. That's faith. And this serves, I think, as a good illustration of the Christian life. A Christian is never going to live the Christian life without running sooner or later, and mostly sooner, into some Jericho, some massive kind of problem. And he can collapse, or he can charge ahead, trusting that God said, "I'll solve your

problems.” And if he does by faith what God wants him to do, and charges into the obstacle, he'll know the victory.

There's another illustration of the faith that conquers. Look at verse 31. By faith the harlot”—prostitute—“Rahab perished not with them that believed not when she had received the spies with peace.”

Isn't it interesting? It shows you about the grace of God how a prostitute found her way into the hall of fame with the heroes of faith. And one thing for sure, she wasn't saved by her work. Verse 31 introduces Rahab. Now, Rahab was out for a lot of reasons. She was out because of her profession. She was out because she was a Gentile. She was—worse than that—she was a Canaanite. Worse than that, she was an Amorite, and she was a member of a race that God had devoted to destruction. But that's how God's grace works. His mercy is open to all who will receive Him. And God's race has always been wider than Israel, even in the Old Testament.

Now, notice verse 31, “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not”—them that believed not; who's that? That's the whole city of Jericho.

You say, “What didn't they believe?”

They didn't believe the word of the Lord.

You say, “You mean they heard the word of the Lord?”

Of course they did. They knew that God had given the land to the children of Israel. I don't know how they got the message, but they got it. They knew it, because they rejected it. They disobeyed. You can't disobey orders you don't have. Right? They had the information. When it says, “They believed not,” the word is *apeitheō* in the Greek. It means literally to be disobedient. Disobedience means that you heard a command and didn't do it. I believe that God had given them the word that the land was for Israel, and that God was going to destroy. But all who turned to Him in mercy would be set free. But they did not believe Him, and so they were wiped out. But she believed it. It says, “She perished not with them that believed

not, when she had received the spies with peace.” Which literally in the Greek means she gave them a welcome—dechoma, to welcome with hospitality.

Now, the record of this is in Joshua chapter 2 and chapter 6. And you’ll remember the story when the spies went in to check out the land, they got into Jericho and they got into a little bit of trouble, and they had to be hidden. So, they got into Rahab’s house, and she welcomed them with hospitality, and she hid them in straw up on the roof. And the people came who were the authorities, and they said, “Have you seen the spies,” etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and so forth. And we don't justify her lie at that point; we only say that she believed God. She had the right idea; she just took about it—went about it in the wrong way. But she hid the spies. And then she let them out. And she told them why she did it. She did it because she knew God had given the land to them, and she believed in their God. She accepted the truth that she had heard.

Well, the rest of them didn't, and so God wiped out the city. Dr. Arnold said that the destruction of the Canaanites was as great a gain to the welfare of humanity from purely a social view as it was from a spiritual one. They were debauched people, to put it mildly. They were the worst kind imaginable.

History tells us that when they built buildings, they took live babies, dropped them in jars, and built them into the walls. They were involved in all kinds of orgies and atrocities that are actually too perverted for even mention from a public position. And God punished that city, but he spared one dear woman who believed. And I want to read you Joshua 2, verse 9, “And she said unto the men”—listen to this—“I know that the Lord hat given you the land”—got it? She said, “I believe it.”—“and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.” Everybody knew God had given the land to Israel. They were all worried about it. God had given them the message somehow. ““For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you”—which must have been tough to handle—“when you came out of Egypt; and what you did unto the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

““And as soon as heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did their remain any more courage in any man because of you”—boy, they were shook; watch this—“for the Lord

your God, He is”—what?—“God.” You know what she did? She put her faith in the true God. She believed God’s word, and she believed in God.

And you know something? It took courage to do that. There wasn't really a chance in a million, physically speaking, that those children of Israel could knock off Jericho, but she staked her life on the fact that God had said they would, and she wanted to be on God’s side. The rest of the populace, there wasn't one other believer that we know about that believed that God was really in control. Not one other one. But she believed. And it took courageous faith to hide those spies. And she could have lost her life. It also took faith to believe those spies. How did she know them? How did she know that when she said, “I’ll protect you if you promise to spare me,” that they would keep their promise? She had great courage.

And you know something? God honored that prostitute in Jericho, that Amorite. You know how He honored her? First of all, He honored her by salvation. But more than that, for our consideration at this moment, certainly not more than that in terms of eternal things, she became the mother of Boaz. Boaz became the husband of Ruth, the great-great grandmother of David. Rahab the harlot moved right into the Messianic line. That's God’s grace.

Verse 32. Here’s somebody else with some courage. “And what shall I say more? For the time would fail me”—He had the same problem I do—“to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and the prophet”—He said, “I could just go on and on and on.” See? We always say that's usually when a guy’s run out of material.

But anyway, verse 32, He starts naming various people, great heroes of faith. And they're not in chronological order, incidentally, but they're all rulers. Four of them are judges, Samuel was both a judge and a prophet and so forth in the transition, and David was a king. They're all great rulers, and you—you know these men of faith. “For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon”—oh, you remember Gideon. Gideon packed up 32,000 men. He was the judge who ruled in Israel, and God had given him the commission of wiping out the Midianites. And they were a formidable group. And so, he got his army of 32,000 men, and God said, “That's too many, cut it down.” When God got through paring it down, there were 300 left. Three hundred. And it wasn't by who was the best at wrestling and so forth and so on, or who was

the strongest or the most accurate with weapons; it was just a question of how you drank water. Three hundred of them.

And then the Lord said, “Here are your orders.” Go and surround the camp of the Midianites, which would be a task in itself for 300 people. It’d be quite far apart. And He said, “I want you to take with you these weapons: one torch, one pitcher, and a trumpet.” That’s a little strange, especially if there’s only 300 of you, and you’re going to fight the whole Midianite army. Then God said, “Just stand on the hillside, surrounding the valley where the Midianites are, light your torches, smash your pitchers, blow your horns, and all the Midianites will run around and kill each other.” You know what happened? Just that. They smashed the pitchers, the lamps were lit, they blew the horns, and the Midianites ran around panicked and killed each other. And what was left of them ran away. Now you believe it, folks, that took faith to do what Gideon did, stand up there on that hill with a pitcher and a trumpet in his hand, with the whole army of the Midianites in the bottom of the valley, but he believed God. And you know what? He tackled something that you couldn’t tackle unless you had faith in God. He would be a fool if he didn’t believe God.

But you see, friends, true faith, the pinnacle of faith is that it has the courage to conquer and struggle. No enemy’s too great. Then Barak—you might not remember so much about Barak, Judges chapter 4. What a fantastic character he was. He took 10,000 men, and he was assigned the task of fighting against Sisera. Sisera was a commander-in-chief of the confederate chariot force of the Canaanites, which would be like a tank division. And this was a tremendous, tremendous, powerful force. Now there were incredible odds. There was just no way, practically speaking, that Barak could handle Sisera, but he believed God. And he said, “OK, guys, pack it up; here we go.” He entered the fray. If he hadn’t believed God, he would have been an idiot to do it. But he believed God, entered in, and won a battle. In fact, Sisera jumped out of his chariot and took off running. God had plans for him, too. He ran right into the tent of Jael—J-A-E-L—the wife of Heber. And Jael had a plan. She gave him some milk with a little bit of a drug in it, and when he laid down to take a rest, she took a big nail and drove it through his temples and nailed him to the floor. And that was the end of him.

But God through all this—to put it mildly. It's for sure he didn't wake up and say, “I have a headache.” They had the courage—they had the courage to believe God for an impossible task, and because they believed it, God fulfilled it.

Then you find who's the next one in the list. Samson. You say, “Well, I never thought of Samson as a man of faith.”

Then go back and read Judges 13 through 16 and see how many things in his life were apparently done on the basis of faith. You know, Samson knew he had power, but he knew who the source of power was. He knew that it was God. Right? Sure, he did. And he believed God. Listen, you've got to have a lot of faith to go in there and tackle a lion. Now, he knew God gave him his strength, and he went right in there, tackled that lion. You remember how the account went.

Now, God had called him to be the champion of Israel against the Philistines. Each one of these judges had a particular emphasis. In spite of the terrible tragedy of his life with Delilah, his life still stands out as a great life of faith. He had courage to go in there with that lion.

And boy, he was an irritating spot to the Philistines, no question about it. And all the time he would get in these terrific battles, and he'd be fighting a whole army all alone, and he never for a minute thought God would pull the plug on his power. He believed God, you see. And so, he went in with courage—first in anger at the father of his Philistine wife. He'd married a Philistine girl, which he shouldn't have done, but he was angry at her father because her father gave her away to somebody else.

And so, he got mad and tied 300 fox tails together, put torches between the tails, lit the torches and sent the foxes through the grain fields of the Philistines, which didn't go over real big. The Philistines—Philistines found out about it, and they found out who did it. So, they went and killed his father-in-law and his daughter, which incensed him all the more. He—the Bible says he grew furious, and he smote them with a great slaughter.

Well, they retaliated. They came back after him. He stood his ground, grabbed the jawbone of an ass that happened to be laying around and slew a thousand of them. They tried to trap him in Gaza. “We've got him; he's inside the city.” He just walked along, picked up the gates, the

side posts, and the beam across the top, and carried the gates up on the top of a mountain and threw them down. He believed God. He had to believe God. He didn't stand there saying, "Oh, I'm here again, God. Give me that power. Oh, nervous time," and run away. See? He shot right into the battle because he had his confidence in God. You see? Now that takes courage. You've got to believe God.

And I love the fact that after he had been blinded and was found in the prison house, grinding grain like some kind of an animal, finally his hair began to grow, and he got it right in his heart with God again. And they were going to make a joke out of him and laugh at him a little bit. So, they were having a big feast in the monstrous temple, and they took him out of there, and he said to somebody, "let me lean against the pillars. And so, they took him to the pillars and he just—gave the pillars a big shove and wiped out many Philistines in one fell swoop.

But you know something? If you go back to the 13th chapter of Judges, in the 5th verse, you'll read something very significant. Samson, all his life, knew that God had called him, and that God had empowered him to conquer the Philistines. And he believed God. And he never faced the Philistine army without absolute and total courage. Why? Courage in what, his own strength? No. Courage in what? Courage in the fact that God had promised to give him the power to do it, and he believed God for it.

And you know what's so tragic about so many Christians is that they talk about faith, but their faith doesn't have enough courage to go out and face some kind of a battle, believing that God will give them the victory. And so, they hang back, waiting for reinforcements all their life.

Then you come to Jephthah. What about Jephthah? Judges 11:32 and 33, another one of Israel's enemies was the Ammonites. And the courage of Jephthah knocked off the Ammonites. Again, he believed God, and he faced tremendous, incredible odds and won the victory. After Jephthah comes David. Well, I don't even need to go into that to begin with. He spent his whole life facing incredible odds. It all began when he fought against Goliath. There's no way that a child such as David was going to have victory over a giant and experienced warrior like Goliath, but David believed God. I don't—it's really strange to even imagine a kid like David even wanting to do what he did. But he did it because he knew God was with him.

In 1 Samuel 17:46, “This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee”—don't you like that?

You say, “You brash kid.”

“And I'll give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air and the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there's a God in Israel.” Where did he get that kind of courage? He believed God. He believed God.

And you come to Samuel, dear Samuel. Great man of faith. You know, he never fought in any wars, Samuel, but he fought a tougher battle than physical war. You know what he fought? He fought the battle of idolatry. He fought the battle of immorality. You know what he had to do? He had to stand up in the midst of a polluted society and speak the truth. And that's tough. He had to stand for the courage of his convictions when all of his people were going down the tubes of immorality. When all the people were beginning to move toward idols, he stood up and rang true to the living God, and that's a battle that may be the most difficult any man ever faces: the courage of his convictions in the face of an immoral world. And he had the courage to do it.

And then the prophets. So many of them, such courageous men. Verse 33 says, “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought 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 fight, turned to fight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again”—stop right there. These great men of time past and including those wonderful prophets all the way from Samuel to John the Baptist, they achieved. They achieved conquest in the midst of struggle because they believed God.

This is a—this is a list of men who never believed that God was on the side of big battalions. They were willing to risk everything because they believed God. It's a list of people who cheerfully and courageously and confidently accepted God's commands and stood absolutely alone, face to face with apparently undefeatable, hostile hordes, for the sake of obedience to God. And in every case, they came out on top. They conquered. And they did it through faith.

It says in verse 33, “They subdued kingdoms”—katagōnizomai means to put down; they were victorious—“they wrought righteousness”—literally the Greek means they executed justice. It refers, you see, to leaders who upheld justice against the pressures. David was such a man against all kinds of pressures, against all kinds of potential bribery and to be bought off; he held justice high.

It says in 2 Samuel 8:15, “And David reigned over all Israel and executed justice,” and it's the same phrase used here. It has to do with them doing what was right when everybody else was doing what was wrong, and that takes courage. They obtained promises. Oh, God gave them all promises and said, “I'll give you the victory,” and they obeyed, and they obtained the victory.

“They stopped the mouths of lions.” To whom does that refer? Daniel. Remember Daniel? The king said, “Don't worship anybody but me.”

Daniel said, “I'll worship God.” And Daniel didn't go in his closet and worship God, he turned towards his window and threw it wide open and worshipped God where everybody could see him.

And they said, “You're going to get thrown in the lions' den.”

And Daniel said, “That's OK.”

And they threw him in the lions' den. And as the song says, “All the lions got lockjaw.”

You say, “Well, I don't know if God could handle a lion's den. Oh, that's kind of a scary deal.”

You don't think God can handle that? Listen to Daniel chapter 6, verse 32—or 22, “Then said Daniel unto the king, ‘Oh king, live forever.’” Which is, you know, the common greeting “long live the king.” “My God hath sent his angle and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocence was found in me; and also, before thee, O king, have I don't know hurt.’

“Then was the king exceedingly glad for him and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him”—watch this—bang—does this come home—“because he believed in his God.” You get it? Because he believed in his God, not only were the lions’ mouths shut, but because he believed in his God, he came back out of the lions’ den a greater man in front of the world than he ever was before he went in. He trusted God to take him through a circumstance, come out the other side, and be stronger for it.

It says, after that, verse 34, that some of these men courageously quenched the violence of fire. You remember three of them in Daniel’s day, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? The three Hebrew children who were thrown into a fiery furnace. Why? Because they believed God. And they got in there, who was in there with them? Jesus Christ Himself in a pre-incarnate form. They had courage.

Now, friends, faith in its pinnacle, has the courage to conquer in the face of any struggle. It says further, “They escaped the edge of the sword.” David escaped the sword of Goliath, and there are others. They believed God. They went into battle, and God protected them. Out of weakness they were made strong.

There’s a great story about that. Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a great king, and back in 1 Kings 2:4, God had said, “As long as you're faithful, as long as you're obedient, as long as you're righteous, there shall not fail a man on the throne.” In other words, there will be a line of sons on the throne.

Well, you know what happened to old Hezekiah? He got old, and he was about to die. And he was getting ready to die, and he didn't have a son. And so, he recalled God’s promise, and he started to talk to the Lord. He said, “Lord, you’ve got a promise to keep now, and I'm going to believe you for it even though I'm about to die.” And out of his weakness, he became strong. God reached down, touched old Hezekiah. He lived for 15 more years, and he bore a son. And God honored his faith. Out of weakness came strength.

Then “they became valiant in fight and turned to fight the armies of the aliens.” So many of them, you couldn't even begin to list all of them that won great battles.

And then it goes on to say in 35, “Women received dead raised to life again.” You remember the case of Elijah? Elijah and the child of the widow of Zarephath? That's in 1 Kings 17, I think. And Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, he healed her dead son. Remember Elisha who raised the child of the Shunammite woman? And that is in 2 Kings chapter 4. The faith of both of those prophets brought back those children from the dead. They believed God could do it. And he did it. And that was the struggle of death.

You know, when you think of all this, and then you come to these little Hebrews that this is being written to, who are sitting there, bellyaching because their hassled by their families for identifying with Christ, it seems rather inconsequential, doesn't it? And then you take it a step further, and you think about the way we doubt God and the piddly, little, tiny things in life, it makes of us something to be ashamed of that we don't believe God. We don't even begin to know the kind of struggles these people went through, and they believed God in the face of them.

But you know something they achieved, but it isn't always so. But the courage of faith is not only courage to continue in struggle, or to conquer in struggle, but secondly, to continue in suffering. Sometimes God doesn't design the battle to be victorious. He only designs the battle to go on and on and on and on. You know, there are people who always say, “Well, you know, it's been like this so long, and I just don't seem to be getting any better.”

Well, God's working through that, even in its elongation. And the second characteristic of courage as faith—is that it continues in suffering. Verse 35, and this is the absolute pinnacle. Oh, yeah, faith is great that conquers, but faith is even greater that continues in suffering. This is the absolute high point—the Germans would say the *hochpunkt*. This is it; you don't get any higher than this. The kind of faith that continues in suffering without murmuring, without saying a word, but believing God for it every minute of the way. Verse 35—oh, I love this— “And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. *Tumpanizō*. Interesting word “tortured.” It literally means to torture with a *tumpanon*. That was a wheel-shaped instrument over which criminals were stretched as though they were skins, and then they were beaten with clubs. Do you know that some people, for their love of God, went through that? They did. And they could have deliverance, it says in verse 35, but they did not accept deliverance. Why? Because it was at the point of

recanting their faith. They were to deny their God, and they wouldn't do it. They'd rather suffer than deny their God.

It's reminiscent of Martin Luther, isn't it? "I cannot; I will not; here I stand, so help me, God," said Luther. He had the courage of his convictions. Oh, many throughout history have.

You say, "What gave them the courage to stand and not to deny their faith?"

Verse 35, the end, "That they might obtain a"—what?—"better resurrection." They looked for a future. They had their eyes on something glorious in the future. They never sacrificed the future on the altar of the immediate; they wanted a full reward and resurrection. They didn't want just a resurrection; they wanted a better one. They wanted the fullness of reward. And so, they endured torture. And the very word gives us excruciating visions of what they went through.

Verse 36, "Others had trial of cruel mockings"—you know, sometimes the hardest pressure that comes against us is mental pain, the anguish of being criticized. Jeremiah went through this. Jeremiah, that blessed, weeping prophet who spent his life crying over Israel. Nobody ever listened to him. They mocked him so much. But he did it; he took it.

"Others through scourgings"—and Jeremiah as well—"moreover bonds and imprisonments." Verse 37, "They were stoned" and what a horrible thing that was. We talked about it in reference to Stephen, how they would throw them off a little precipice, and then the one who had the accusation, the first witness, would throw a stone—a large stone on the heart. And if it killed the individual, the stoning was over. If it didn't, then the next witness would join in, and finally all the people would cast stones until he was dead. They did this to great Old Testament saints who would not recant their faith.

"Others were sawn asunder"—tradition tells us that that's what happened Isaiah. Blessed Isaiah. It says tradition was sawn in half. The people got so sick of hearing him preach they finally just cut him in half.

“Others were tested”—it's hard to know exactly what this means, but perhaps best explained by just simply meaning the torture of being pressured to deny their God. They were tested to the point of breaking to deny God.

“Others were slain with the sword”—and the literal Greek here is very interesting. It means they "died by sword slaughter," which has to do with a mass kind of slaughter. Some Old Testament faithful were just slaughtered en masse rather than deny God. Oh, they had such courage. Courage is amazing.

“Others, they wandered about in sheepskin and goatskin, being destitute, afflicted, tormented”—skip to verse 38 in the middle—“they wandered in deserts, in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” What does that mean? That means they're poor. Some of them, because they came to a knowledge of God, and because they believed in Him, had to forsake everything the world had to offer. They lived in absolute poverty. The only thing they could put on their bodies were sheepskins and goatskins. And they were destitute. They were afflicted. They were tormented. Literally oppressed, *kakoucheō*, which means to be maltreated. And they wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth.

You know, the Old Testament history isn't, by any measure, complete, folks. There were others. Here's just a little look at what some of these people went through. What courage. How it shames us.

And then this most powerful statement at the beginning of verse 38. Just let it sink into your mind. Parenthesis, “Of whom the world was not”—what?—“worthy”—isn't that a powerful statement? “(Of whom the world wasn't worthy).” You know something? This world isn't good enough to even let those kinds of people live in it. The terrible suffering that came to the people of God was met with faith, and it was met with courage. And the world wasn't even worthy of having them around.

You know, the world drove them out. The world thought they were unworthy to live with us. And the fact of the matter is they were so worthy they shouldn't have even been in the world at all. And believe me, folks, God will make up for it in heaven forever. They'll be worthy of everything they receive up there.

The apostle Paul said that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be ours. We may suffer here; we may have trials, but believe me, God will reward.

First Peter 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”—watch this—“to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven.” Can you imagine some of those suffering believers in Peter’s day were rejoicing about what was going to be theirs? This world isn’t worthy of people who have the courage of faith to suffer for Christ. Do you know that? This world isn’t worthy of them. They’re far too good.

And this, dear ones, is the pinnacle of faith. There it is. It’s the pinnacle of faith to endure trial with courage and faith in God and never waiver. That’s it. To just sum that whole thought up, let me read you two verses that are moving verses indeed. Daniel 3:17 and 18. Listen as I read; listen with spiritual ears. And this was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, “If it be so, our God whom we serve”—watch it—“is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace”—do you believe that? Do you believe God’s able to deliver you? Do you believe it? Listen to this—“and He will deliver us”—do you like that better? I love this; oh, is this good—“But if not, let it be known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods”—you got it?—“God can deliver us. God will deliver us, but if not, we won’t serve your gods.” Boy, that’s it, isn’t it? That wraps up the whole thing. That’s the kind of faith that endures in the midst of suffering, whether there’s victory or not. So, true faith has the courage to conquer in struggle, to continue in suffering.

Thirdly and lastly, and just quickly, true faith has the courage to count on salvation. You know, they had to live in hope, didn’t they? They had to hope. The abiding confidence of all these people, what was it? They believed that God would redeem them and reward them someday when all the suffering was over.

Look at verse 39, “And these all”—what did He mean these all? Everybody from Abel to Samuel, and everybody through the prophets, and everybody who went through anything in those days—all of them, “All of them, having received witness through faith, received not the

promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

Now, let's look at verse 39. What promise? “These all, having received witness through faith, received not the promise”—what promise is He talking about? Not the promise of the land, because that promise was never given to Abel and Enoch. What promise are you talking about that these all received? I'll tell you what the promise of a Redeemer. The promise of Messiah. The promise of a covenant that could bring perfection. The promise of a salvation that could bring men into God's presence totally and fully. And only the New Covenant can do it, right? And He's right back to where He started with the New Covenant.

They never had it fulfilled; they never received the New Covenant. They never knew the Messiah, but they believed in the promise, though it never came. And, you know, in 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 10, it says they looked to see when it was going to come, “Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you”—watch—“searching what person or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify.” In other words, they were looking to see when and how the Redeemer would come. And you know something? In the midst of all their suffering, they were the courageous ones who counted on salvation. They believed God for it. The promise of full, final salvation.

Verse 40, but they didn't receive it because, “God had provided a better thing for us”—what is the better thing in the book of Hebrews? The New Covenant. They never found the promise in the Old Covenant; it was never there. They never found full access to God. There was always what hanging between them and God? The veil. They never found the freedom of conscience that comes with total forgiveness, because they had to sacrifice over and over and over and over and over. They never found the perfect high priest because their priest kept dying on them.

But God provided a better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. In other words, their perfection had to wait for us. The New Covenant gave them what the Old Covenant couldn't give.

In chapter 7, verse 11, of Hebrews, he makes that very statement, “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise?” Verse 19, “For the law made nothing perfect, and the bringing in of a better hope by which we draw near unto God.” The old system couldn't bring them to God; the new one did. But they had to wait for full access to God's presence until Christ came and died. They looked to something in the future as we look to something in the past.

Hey, friends, do me a favor. Don't think that these people were second-rate believers. Are you ready for this? You know, and you believe because you've seen it. You're on the other side of the cross. Jesus said, “Blessed are they which have not seen”—what?—“yet believe.” These are great people of faith. They had faith in the future unseen, and we have faith in the past that we've seen. So, they lived by faith, and oh, what a courageous faith. So courageous they conquered and struggled. They continued suffering, and in all of it they counted on salvation to come. And they never saw it, but they believed God for it. They got it on credit. And here we see the courage of faith and pinnacle of faith in this glorious chapter.

I close with this: the world wasn't worthy of these people. Oh, I pray God that we would live the kind of lives that it might be said of us, “The world isn't worthy of them.”