

Faith Endures Great Things

Hebrews 11:35-38

Halifax: 28 January 2024

Introduction:

In our sermon series on the book of Hebrews, we are in chapter 11.

- The first ten chapters of Hebrews present Jesus as God's Son who fulfilled all that God required to save His people from their sins.
 - He is gloriously presented, especially with regard to His superior priestly work and sacrifice of Himself which accomplishes the salvation that the Old Testament ordinances only typified.
- In chapter 10, we are exhorted to trust in Him.
 - It is explained that His saving benefits that reconcile us to God come to those who have faith in Him as given for the church's salvation.
- In chapter 11, where we are now, we are given a list of examples of those who had faith in the Old Testament as models for us, showing what faith looks like and what it does in the lives of God's people.

Last week, we saw that the author declared that he had given us enough examples to be sufficient, even though many more could be provided.

- He then proceeded to draw some summary conclusions about the workings of faith, providing us with a contrast.
 - The contrast was between faith that does great things and faith that endures great things—we might call these triumphant faith and enduring faith.
 - After looking at that contrast, we then focused on triumphant faith, looking at the extraordinary things that were done through faith such as subduing kingdoms, stopping the mouths of lions, quenching the violence of fire, and seeing people raised from the dead!
 - I explained that these are important for us to consider, not because we are likely to experience such marvels (for God does not ordinarily do such things) but that we might trust God to enable us to do what He has called us to do—first of all, to trust in Christ for salvation—and then to trust in Him for living a godly life, bringing up our children, overcoming sin, serving others, and so on.
 - Seeing that God can do marvels when He calls people to do them should give us confidence that He can help us in what He calls us to do day by day.
- Today, we are going to take a similar approach in looking at the hard things that faith enables us to endure.
 - Our focus will be on verses 35b – 38 where we have examples of marvellous endurance of everything from martyrdom to banishment in the wilderness.
 - We could be called to martyrdom or banishment, but whether that be so or not, as believers, we are called to endure things that are hard to endure every day—and the message is that if those who are severely persecuted are able to endure by faith what God has called them endure, we ought to be able to endure what God has called us to endure. It is done by faith!

Let's go to our scripture reading.

- I will include the part that we focused on last week, so our reading will begin with Hebrews 11:32 and conclude at Hebrews 11:40—just like last week.

Heb 11:32-40: And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked 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, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶

Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens* and caves of the earth. ³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Thanks be to God for this beautiful and very helpful passage.

- May it be helpful to each one of us today and strengthen us for the future that God has for us which will surely include many triumphs and many hardships to endure.

Because our goal is, as always, to apply God's word to our own lives, I have set up four headings that compare the sufferings of those described with us.

- These heading are as follows:
 - Their suffering and ours.
 - Their endurance and ours.
 - Their faith and ours.
 - Their worthiness and ours.

Let's begin with the first heading:

I. Their sufferings and ours.

A. We have examples here of severe persecutions of God's people.

1. Persecution occurs because people are guilty before God.

- They try their best to avoid Him—to deny their guilt, to cover it up, to make excuses, to blame others—whatever they can.
- It enrages them when they see someone who, by God's grace, has been reconciled to the true God and who is living at peace with Him through Christ.
 - They employ different means of trying to get rid of the example.
 - They look for hypocrisy and make much of every sin they see in us.
 - They come up with explanations and excuses and all sorts of things—sometimes they even speak in a way of admiration to ease their conscience and really may admire certain things—but they don't come to Christ.
- But they also try to destroy us...
 - Either by leading us into sin or by punishing us for offending them by following Jesus.
 - We are seeing more of that sort of thing in our society all the time—you can lose your job simply for believing what God says about marriage and gender.
- Sometimes, in the hands of those who have much authority, the rage is seen in the very extreme persecutions that are truly diabolical.
 - The supreme example is the persecution of Jesus Christ that led His enemies to demand that He be crucified, choosing a murderer and robber before Him!

2. In our text, we have examples of extreme persecutions that our fathers in the faith have endured and that people in various parts of the world continue to endure today.
 - a. The first one is introduced to contrast it from those who had triumph by faith with the word “Others.”
 - And it says, v. 35-b, **“Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance.”**
 - Here is an example well known to the Jews that occurred in the history of the Maccabees who resisted the efforts of the Greek King Antiochus who tried to force the Jews to embrace Greek culture.
 - In 2 Maccabees 7, we read: It also happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king to force them to eat pork in violation of God’s law. ² One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said: “What do you expect to learn by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.” ³ At that the king, in a fury, gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. ⁴ These were quickly heated, and he gave the order to cut out the tongue of the one who had spoken for the others, to scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of his brothers and his mother looked on. ⁵ When he was completely maimed but still breathing, the king ordered them to carry him to the fire and fry him. As a cloud of smoke spread from the pan, the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, with these words: ⁶ “The Lord God is looking on and truly has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song, when he openly bore witness, saying, ‘And God will have compassion on his servants.’” ⁷ After the first brother had died in this manner, they brought the second to be made sport of. After tearing off the skin and hair of his head, they asked him, “Will you eat the pork rather than have your body tortured limb by limb?” ⁸ Answering in the language of his ancestors, he said, “Never!” So he in turn suffered the same tortures as the first. ⁹ With his last breath he said: “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up* to live again forever, because we are dying for his laws.” ¹⁰ After him the third suffered their cruel sport. He put forth his tongue at once when told to do so, and bravely stretched out his hands, ¹¹ as he spoke these noble words: “It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disregard them; from him I hope to receive them again.” ¹² Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man’s spirit, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing. ¹³ After he had died, they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way. ¹⁴ When he was near death, he said, “It is my choice to die at the hands of mortals with the hope that God will restore me to life; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life.” ¹⁵ They next brought forward the fifth brother and maltreated him. ¹⁶ Looking at the king, he said:^d “Mortal though you are, you have power over human beings, so you do what you please. But do not think that our nation is forsaken by God. ¹⁷ Only wait, and you will see how his great power will torment you and your descendants.” ¹⁸ After him they brought the sixth brother. When he was about to die, he said: “Have no vain illusions. We suffer these things on our own account, because we have sinned against our God; that is why such shocking things have happened. ¹⁹ Do not think, then, that you will go unpunished for having dared to fight against God.” ²⁰ Most admirable and worthy of everlasting

remembrance was the mother who, seeing her seven sons perish in a single day, bore it courageously because of her hope in the Lord. ²¹ Filled with a noble spirit that stirred her womanly reason with manly emotion, she exhorted each of them in the language of their ancestors with these words: ²² “I do not know how you came to be in my womb; it was not I who gave you breath and life, nor was it I who arranged the elements you are made of. ²³ Therefore, since it is the Creator of the universe who shaped the beginning of humankind and brought about the origin of everything, he, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law.” ²⁴ Antiochus, suspecting insult in her words, thought he was being ridiculed. As the youngest brother was still alive, the king appealed to him, not with mere words, but with promises on oath, to make him rich and happy if he would abandon his ancestral customs: he would make him his Friend and entrust him with high office. ²⁵ When the youth paid no attention to him at all, the king appealed to the mother, urging her to advise her boy to save his life. ²⁶ After he had urged her for a long time, she agreed to persuade her son. ²⁷ She leaned over close to him and, in derision of the cruel tyrant, said in their native language: “Son, have pity on me, who carried you in my womb for nine months, nursed you for three years, brought you up, educated and supported you to your present age. ²⁸ I beg you, child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see all that is in them; then you will know that God did not make them out of existing things.² In the same way humankind came into existence. ²⁹ Do not be afraid of this executioner, but be worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that in the time of mercy I may receive you again with your brothers.” ³⁰ She had scarcely finished speaking when the youth said: “What is the delay? I will not obey the king’s command. I obey the command of the law given to our ancestors through Moses. ³¹ But you, who have contrived every kind of evil for the Hebrews, will not escape the hands of God. ³² We, indeed, are suffering because of our sins. ³³ Though for a little while our living Lord has been angry, correcting and chastising us, he will again be reconciled with his servants. ³⁴ But you, wretch, most vile of mortals, do not, in your insolence, buoy yourself up with unfounded hopes, as you raise your hand against the children of heaven. ³⁵ You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty and all-seeing God. ³⁶ Our brothers, after enduring brief pain, have drunk of never-failing life, under God’s covenant. But you, by the judgment of God, shall receive just punishments for your arrogance. ³⁷ Like my brothers, I offer up my body and my life for our ancestral laws, imploring God to show mercy soon to our nation, and by afflictions and blows to make you confess that he alone is God. ³⁸ Through me and my brothers, may there be an end to the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.” ³⁹ At that, the king became enraged and treated him even worse than the others, since he bitterly resented the boy’s contempt. ⁴⁰ Thus he too died undefiled, putting all his trust in the Lord. ⁴¹ Last of all, after her sons, the mother was put to death. ⁴² Enough has been said about the sacrificial meals and the excessive cruelties.

- b. You can see the other persecutions that are named.
 - Vs. 36—**Still others had trial of mockings**
 - They were ridiculed and mocked for their faith, made to look foolish and absurd, as was done to Jesus when they told Him to come down

from the cross if He was the Son of God, and said: “He saved others, Himself He cannot save.”

- The verse goes on to speak of **scourgings**—a method that the Greeks used was to stretch a person on the rack and then to beat them, calling them to recant.
- It adds **chains and imprisonments**—they were shut away in dungeons simply for believing the truth—having done no wrong to their tormentors.
- Some of them were **sawn in two**—apparently, Manasseh did that to the prophet Isaiah with a wooden saw.
- They were **tempted**—one of the Maccabees was told that they would let him bring his own meat to eat in public in pretence that he was eating swine.
 - Persecutions often came in little things which made the temptation greater to give in. We know that some of the people Hebrews is written to were asked to worship Caesar only by offering a pinch of incense at his altar. We saw in Jesus’s letters to the seven churches that He commended those who refused such things and died as martyrs.
- They were **slain with sword**—sometimes in mass numbers.
- Verse 37 & 38 speak of how some of them avoided arrest, which is not necessarily wrong—Jesus sometimes did that until His hour had come□ but for some this was a very great hardship.
 - We might think of David who fled from Saul for so many years, or of the prophets in Elijah’s day who hid in groups of 50 in caves...
 - The text says: from the middle of v. 37: **They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.**

B. What about us?

1. Our sufferings may seem very slight in comparison to some of these...
 - But remember the point.
 - If our forefathers were able to bear these things by faith, it assures us that we will be able to bear whatever God calls us to bear for Him by faith.
 - Do not be deceived so as to think that what you do with your sufferings is not important because your sufferings are not as great, or because they are often not the result of persecution.
- That is a lie.
2. We have sufferings that are like theirs, even if not as great.
 - They had to endure pain—so do we.
 - They had to endure being ridiculed—so do we.
 - They had to bear death and bereavement—so do we.
 - They had to endure living with less than others—so do we.
 - They had to bear being rejected or excluded—so do we.
 - We may be friendless and in danger.

TRANS> God has appointed things for us to endure for as long as we are in this world, and it is very important for us to endure them for His glory.

- That brings us to our second heading.

II. Their endurance and ours.

A. Their endurance was remarkable because, as it is noted in verse 35, they did not accept deliverance.

1. In other words, though tortured and offered deliverance—sometimes, not only deliverance, but handsome reward, if they would only recant...

- They refused.

- They said, “I will suffer rather than sin against the Lord.”

2. It is one thing to be sick and have no choice but to suffer—it is quite another to have an easy way of escape and not take it.

- Yet, that is what they did and they are commended for it.

B. This applies to us in our everyday lives as well—even if we have much suffering that is not the result of persecution that could be stopped immediately if we would deny the Lord.

- What are some examples of endurance?

1. An example would be doing our part to maintain a bad marriage when the easy way would be to get a divorce...

- But much more than just refusal to get a divorce.

- It involves doing those little things that can be done every day to strengthen your marriage—acts of kindness, expressions of commitment and love, sacrificing my own interests for the interests of my spouse.

2. Another example would be fidelity to God when your finances are lower than you'd like.

- The one who endures will not cut corners at work to turn a dishonest profit—they may work harder, but they won't cheat.

- The one who endures will continue to tithe—so many who are having financial troubles claim that they cannot tithe because they are having financial troubles. The truth is often that they are having financial troubles because they have not been tithing. It's like Israel when they said they must worship Baal because there was a drought, and the Lord sent the drought because they were worshipping Baal.

3. There is the example of depression. “I can't work because I am depressed.”

- But the reason you are so depressed is actually largely because you have not been working but indulging your feelings.

- Maybe I had a situation where I truly did get behind, but then, instead of rising up to work hard and make up for it, I withdrew and got even more behind.

- This is a very sensitive matter, but one I think we need to hear—when we have extended illness or debilitation—are we really doing all that we can? Are

we pushing ourselves even half as much as a healthy athlete does to gain an earthly reward?

- This requires serious self-examination.

4. And what about if you must endure criticism.

- Are you able to do that in a godly way? Or do you start defending yourself—boasting about your achievements? Do you start pointing out the failure of others? There are times when, as a parent or a minister, you might need to defend yourself (like Paul did) for the sake of your family and the gospel, but what about all those times when you are just being selfish. Maybe some of the criticism is true. You need to bear with it in a godly way.
- Maybe your deliverance from criticism is pornography—you get a fake boost from it.

5. I think I should say a word about enduring daily annoyances too.

- If you are complaining, you are not enduring.
 - Complaining is kind of like a drug you take when you are unhappy with God's providence. Instead dealing with it and returning thanks to Him for all His mercies, you start complaining.
 - Maybe you even do turn to drugs or drink—or eating—instead of complaining—though if anyone saw your heart as God does, they would see a lot of bitterness and complaining.

TRANS> So you see what I mean when I say that we are to bear hard things without accepting deliverance.

- We are not to look for relief in ways that are sinful and that break fellowship with God.
- But how can we endure hard things.
 - That is our subject and what these examples we are looking at today are about.
 - We can endure hard things by faith.
 - That brings us to our third heading.

III. Their faith (these faithful servants of the Lord who endured) and ours.

A. We are told why these faithful martyrs and persecuted brothers and sisters did not accept deliverance—because they looked for a better resurrection.

1. In other words, they did not want to have the half-baked resurrection they were being offered by God's enemies—"we will give you your life back if you will deny the Lord."

- They were looking for a better resurrection—the resurrection that the Lord promises to His people.

2. They endured by faith!

- They believed that God is. They believed that He is God, that He is the one who made us and who holds our destiny in His hands.
 - Because they believed, His blessing and His resurrection was way more desirable to them than the world's blessing and the world's resurrection.
 - The world's resurrection was only a temporal thing!
 - They saw Him who is invisible and they believed His word of promise.

- Like Abraham, they looked for the city whose builder and maker is God.
 - Like Moses, they would rather suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.
 - They considered the reproach and the attacks of that came upon them for serving Christ to be greater riches than all the riches of Egypt.
- B. You need to have faith in the better resurrection that God has for you than whatever sinful relief you turn to.
1. But don't be muddleheaded about faith—we so often are.
 - a. We think trusting God means praying and having Him take the problem away.
 - Say it's a bad marriage.
 - We just want to pray and have Him just turn it around.
 - Of say it's what we consider to be inadequate finances.
 - Our idea of faith is that we pray and someone hands us a check for \$100,000.
 - Sometimes He does that, but we are talking about when we are called to endure hard things.
 - b. Well, so we are stuck with it. What do we want our believing to do in that case?
 - We want to pray and have God just zap us with patience and courage and contentment and whatever it is that we need to endure.
 - Well, He can do that too... but that is not how He usually works either.
 2. But let's look at what God usually does to enable us to endure hard things.
 - a. Ordinarily, He uses our struggle with the hard thing to cultivate faith as we need it—as we go on in the trial.
 - We need to develop faith that truly believes that God's resurrection is better than whatever deliverance the world might offer us.
 - Being released from the rack is not nearly as desirable as being in the presence of His glory forever and ever when we are resurrected to eternal life!
 - b. Let me put it very bluntly—our struggle is whether God is worth enduring hard things for instead of accepting deliverance.
 - That's shameful. That's hard to admit, but there it is!
 - We know and would say that of course God is worth it, but when we turn to sinful things or compromising things for relief, our faith has failed.
 - We are looking for the world's resurrection instead God's resurrection, as if the world's resurrection is better than God's!
 - That's the disgusting reality of our wicked sinful human hearts—even as believers—every time we cave in.
 - We are esteeming the world's resurrection better than God's.
 - c. Ordinarily, we cultivate stronger faith by exercising faith in the trial.
 - For example, take the guy on the rack. He must ask the question, “Is getting off this machine that is stretching my body apart better than my relationship with God?” No, of course not.

- As he wrestles with that, his faith is strengthened.
 - He begins to look at the goodness of God, at the love of God, at the promises of God, at the faithfulness of God, at the truth and justice of God, at the mercy of God, at the grace of God that gives him strength.
 - His faith in God—in who God is—in what God has promised—is strengthened in the midst of the trial.
- If you are enduring discouragement and you turn to your cookie jar instead of to the Lord, you have accepted the cookie jar as your resurrection.
 - But if you look at the Lord and begin to feed on His goodness and faithfulness, to rest in His promises, to delight in His truth and His love, you are looking for the better resurrection.
 - You see the great love of your Lord Jesus who suffered for you, and it makes you able to suffer for Him—even to do it with joy.
- Here is an excellent thing.
 - You can cultivate your relationship with the Lord like this every day.
 - You can cultivate your relationship with potato chips or the internet or people’s admiration or success or whatever you turn to instead—that is what is called addictions.
 - They can never satisfy.
 - We were made for the Lord and there is no true happiness and fulfilment until we find Him.
 - And we find Him by enduring hard things for Him through faith in Him.
 - We look to Him in faith to strengthen us to grow in our faith.
 - To put it plainly, we look to Him in faith to keep us.

TRANS> This is how He transforms you into someone who seeks a better resurrection.

- Even though you may have many sorrows, you become filled with joy and hope because you know that you have an excellent resurrection that He will give you.
 - Already you are enjoying fellowship and communion with Him in your sufferings.
 - You are learning of the grace of Jesus and of His love who suffered for you.
 - He is making you beautiful, like the people we are reading about today.
 - And that brings us to our last heading.

IV. Their worthiness and ours.

A. In verse 38 it tells us that the world was not worthy of these believers who endured torture and banishment for Jesus Christ.

- It says, “of whom the world was not worthy.”
- 1. The best way to understand “the world” here is what we might call “worldlings.”
 - They are the people who have their portion in this world.
 - For them, the important things are riches, honours, and pleasures in this world, and they look at believers as boring and not worthy to be their

companions.

- As they grow deeper in their rebellion against God, they begin to say that believers are evil—that they are like a plague in the world.
 - They say that because we ruin their happiness by reminding them about God whom they are desperately trying to avoid.
 - Their consciences are troubled by us and they want to get rid of us.
 - That's why there have been such vicious attacks against those who follow the Lord—Jesus was completely unacceptable, and so were all His apostles and prophets.
- 2. But here, the Lord turns it around and says that it is not His servants who are unworthy but the world—these worldlings who have their portion in this life.
 - The beautiful people are the ones who have such love for the Lord, and such faith in Him, that they endure hard things for Him.
 - God has formed their character as they walk with Him.
 - They have grown in grace and have borne much fruit that pleases Him.
 - They know Him who is the true God, the real God, the gracious God, the God of love and mercy, the holy God, the almighty.
 - They have found salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and He has transformed them so that the world is not worthy of them.
- B. The Day of Judgment will show that these worldlings are the ones who are unworthy.
 - Psalm 1 puts it quite plainly: **1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.**
- C. Where will you be on that day?
 - Will you be one who is trusting in Jesus and His saving work for the forgiveness of your sin and for reconciliation with God?
 - Or will you be one who is unworthy to come before the Lord of glory because you rejected His call to repent and believe, counting Him and His people to be unworthy of your attention?
 - Are you indeed trusting in Him?