

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Characters of Faith (The Diversity of Faith – Part 8) **Hebrews 11:32**

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets...

As we have been studying the very nature and character of faith, I hope that it has been apparent that faith is dynamic. Faith - this firm trust in the person, promises and provisions of God, this spiritual outlook that affects the very way a person behaves, is always on the go, on the move, always changing. To be sure, this movement of faith can be an ebb and flow, sometimes increasing, as our faith grows through the study and experience of God; and sometimes decreasing as trials and circumstances can, sadly, rob someone of a former intensity of faith. So then, faith is dynamic, not static, or still, but either moving toward greater trust in God or toward a dangerous trust in self. By and large, we have been looking at the dynamics of faith in Hebrews 11, how faith moved simple, ordinary people to a greater trust in God.

But along with faith being so dynamic, as we come to the closing verses of Hebrews 11, I would have you see a most interesting and encouraging thought – that faith is also diverse – or to say it more accurately, there is a great diversity in the expressions of faith. God does not desire, nor require cookie-cutter Christians. While the Lord does desire the faith of His children to grow and more clearly manifest itself; and while I would be negligent not to encourage and challenge you in such growth – the variable here is that each one of us will manifest our faith in a diversity of ways. Not many of you are preachers here this morning. By faith I stand before you declaring the truth of God's word – but as you well know, that does not mean that those who do not stand before God's people to expound the word are faithless. Some here manifest their faith by being more passionately devoted to the ministry of prayer, or to the showing of hospitality, or to the encouragement of the saints. Faith – genuine saving faith will manifest itself in God's children in a variety of ways.

And this should be good news to us - that the people of faith are not all alike in their expressions of faith; that each of us is given a personality by the Lord and individually shaped in the image of Christ. Each of us experiences the providential working of God in our lives through will every detail; and therefore every nuance of life is meant to bring us into greater conformity with Christ and to the glory of God. And it all happens by faith.

What I wish to present to you today is this – that the way faith manifests itself in the lives of God's people is diverse, and, in spite of our own individual failures and short-comings, God will use our faith in Him to accomplish His greater purposes. We see this very thing here in Hebrews 11:32, in a list of names that while we, even like those who first heard these words in that little Hebrew congregation, can consider the faith of these mentioned, can also notice that some of them, if not all of them, certainly carried some dark shadows. As we will see in a moment, Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah are not generally the first names that come to mind when the word "faith" is involved. And while it might be easier to understand the inclusion of men like David or Samuel, their association with these other names is interesting to say the least.

From Hebrews 11:32 then let us consider two things – first, let us consider the notable failures of the men mentioned in this list, failures that result from walking by sight, by human reason – rather than by faith; and seeing how these failures are found in many of our own lives and then, second, let us consider the notable successes of these men, successes that were obtained only "by faith" in the person, promises and provisions of God. And as we begin this

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process, let me tell you the reason why we are looking at these failures as well as these successes – because true faith will manifest itself differently in various believers and will manifest itself even in light of or in contrast to our failures. I am grateful to a God who uses us in spite of our shortcomings.

I. The Failure and Faith of Gideon

Our Hebrews 11:32 text begins with these words, **“And what more shall I say?”** It is as though the author has said more than enough for us to appreciate the character of faith and then evaluate the nature of our own faith. Do we really need to consider any more? It is as though he would like to, but he has neither the time, nor evidently the ink to expound on other examples of faith as he writes, **“for time will fail me if I tell...”** these other stories.

But our author does do something significant, something that we ought not to miss – he mentions six men by name, calling these further examples of the character of faith. But as I noted already, this is an interesting (and eclectic) list of names, a list that certainly includes faithful men, but faithful men that also had notable failures. And yet God used these men mightily even in spite of such failures. The great reformer John Calvin made this insightful comment about faith and failure in the lives of God’s people saying,

“In every saint there is always to be found something reprehensible. Nevertheless, although faith may be imperfect and incomplete, it does not cease to be approved by God.”

I am so glad that God uses the imperfect and incomplete. Let us look now at Gideon and these others to consider the nature of their imperfections and incompleteness.

First mentioned is Gideon, whose story is recorded for us in Judges 6-8. If I were to summarize Gideon’s failure in a word, I would say “doubter” – for in Gideon we see the faith of a doubter. How’s that for a contradiction in terms. But let us look at Judges 6 and see this doubter who became faithful –

In Judge 6:1-10 we read that the Midianites had utterly demoralized the people of Israel. Why had this happened? If you look at the end of verse 10, the prophet records the words of the LORD, **“But you have not obeyed [listened] to Me.”** In verse 13, Gideon asked a revealing question, **“O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our father told us about...”** Gideon had doubted God’s statement of verse 12 that the LORD was with him. Rather than take God at his word, he questioned God’s sincerity. As God continues to patiently work with this doubting Gideon, He reminds him in verse 14 that God Himself was sending Gideon out. Here we are reminded that we are to go out not in our own strength but in the strength of the LORD. But once again, we read in 6:15, Gideon’s right, but doubting response, **“How shall I deliver Israel? Behold my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.”** I see in this statement both the sense of failure as well as the seeds of faith. He doubted that he could do it, but if the LORD was on his side anything would be possible. Perhaps then we are seeing here this Old Testament “Doubting Thomas” one who is becoming more like an Old Testament John the Baptist recognizing that he must decrease the LORD must increase in his life.

One other example of Gideon’s doubting is found in the account of the fleece in Judges 6:36-38 – you know, first, if the fleece is covered with dew but the ground is dry, the I will know you God will deliver Israel. When God did that, just to make sure Gideon then asks that fleece be dry and the ground wet.

And there is even a third example of Gideon’s doubting – after all these appearances of the LORD to him, Gideon is told to go spy out the camp of the Midianites in Judges 7, and

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when he overhears a dream of one of the enemies concerning Israel's victory, then Judges 7:15 records that Gideon bowed in worship and returned to the camp of Israel saying, ***"Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands."***

Beloved, not only did God use this man to bring about a great victory in Israel, but the Spirit-inspired author of Hebrews calls this doubter an example of faith. While it is true that Gideon needed much convincing and many signs – God patiently worked with Gideon and used him, along with just 300 other men, to route the Midian and Amalakite armies. This is what Gideon, the once doubter, did by faith according to Judges 7:19-22

19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. 20 When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" 21 Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. 22 When they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

Beloved, some of us here are tempted to doubt – to worry and fret about God's presence and power in your life. Ultimately we can have victory over such doubt when we come to take God at His word. We can doubt that we can effectively share the gospel, but let us not forget that Jesus said, ***"You shall be My witnesses..."*** in Acts 1:8 and 1 Peter 2:9 reminds us that we are ***"a chosen race ... [who] ... proclaim the excellencies of Him who as called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light."*** Let us stop doubting and believe!

II. The Failure and Faith of Barak

The second man mentioned in Hebrews 11:32 is Barak. His story is recorded for us in Judges 4. Jabin, the king of Canaan ruled the land through the force of his top army commander, a man by the name of Sisera and was situated in a city called Hazor, which is about 9 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, way up in northern Israel. Barak, some kind of leader, was near Hazor. In other words, Barak had Jabin and Sisera in the cross-hairs. All he needed to do was to gather the troops and then take the country that God had given to the tribe of Naphtali. But rather than move by faith, something held Barak back. He did not move forward. Barak's name means "lightening" but there was nothing swift or fast here. Then in Judges 4:6-7, the prophetess Deborah, who is way down south in Ephraim, summons Barak and we read her words –

Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, "Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon and will give him into your hand."

The message of God seem clear enough and yet we see in Judges 4:8 what I will call the failure of trying to negotiate with the command of God. He says to Deborah the prophetess,

"If you will go with me, then I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."

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Now some say that there is no real doubt or failure on Barak's part. He just wanted the presence of God to go with him and prophetess represented God's presence. But his statement is nothing but an attempt to rewrite what God has said. God said, "Go, and march" – Barak said, "I will if you will do this..." How often do we miss out on blessings and spiritual victories because we are unwilling to simply do things God's way, trying to negotiate with God, to change the terms or requirements of His Word. From the story of Barak we learn that trying to negotiate with God results in the loss of a blessing as Barak would not personally defeat Sisera, but would be upstaged by Jael, a fast-thinking woman who would drive a tent peg through Sisera's temple while he slept from exhaustion.

But does this weakness, this failure of Barak render him useless to God. No – the prophetess does go up with Barak and the army of 10,000 from Naphtali and Zebulun meet the army of Sisera according to Judges 4:14. This was now an act of faith, for Sisera had 900 iron chariot and a vastly superior army both numerically and experientially. But what do we read in Judges 4:15? ***"The LORD routed [confused] Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak."***

In spite of his feeble negotiation tactics, the LORD strengthened the faith of Barak and he led Israel to a great victory – by faith. Beloved – the point of this is not to justify trying to negotiate with God, but to consider the great honor that would have been Barak's if he had but obeyed the first command of God without trying to alter it. Again, how many blessings do we miss out on because we want to alter how we will go about following God's Word? But I am grateful to God that He patiently worked with Barak the negotiator to bring about a God-glorifying faith in him for this gives hope to all of us who at one time or another have tried to manipulate God and His word.

III. The Failure and Faith of Samson

The next name given, while certainly famous in both Hebrew and Christian understanding, would also not typically be near the top of the list of the "faithful." Samson, who we read about in Judges 13-16, was a picture of strength (was he not?) – both of physical strength as well as the strength of lust in the heart of a man who entertains it. In Samson we see the God instilled faith in a very stubborn man.

Samson was destined by God to be a great man, which he was, but he would have been a greater man if had sought to consistently walk by faith rather than by sight. Let me point out just a couple of the more obvious failures in Samson's life from Judges 14-16, events that would hardly get anyone on the "A" list of faith. First, in Judges 14:1-4, we read of Samson's problem with lust as he does nothing more and see a woman in Timnah, a pagan woman and immediately wants her for a wife. Samson had never met her, but wanted her. He disregarded the counsel of his parents and insisted on having his own way. Samson was out of the will of God, and while God would use this situation to glorify Himself and to punish the Philistines, God never approved of the sin. All this reminds us that God does not need perfect people or perfect situations to accomplish His perfect purposes.

Samson's second failure was his disregard for God's Word. He had been vowed a Nazarite from birth, meaning he was to live a life of separation. There were three specific things a Nazarite was not supposed to do. He was not supposed to touch dead bodies, he was not to drink wine, and he was not supposed to cut his hair. These things a Nazarite was to do by faith. In Judges 14:5 we find Samson in a vineyard. What was he doing in the vineyard? Well, we read in verses 10-11 that Samson regularly held a feast along with 30 companions and the implication is that this was a drinking party. Additionally we know that

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Samson touched the carcass of the lion he had killed some time before and finally, well, you know the story, Samson had his hair shaved off by the lovely and talented Delilah.

Samson was captured by the Philistines, his eyes were gouged out and he was made to entertain the lords of Philistia. But the author of Hebrews tells us that Samson was an example of faith. How so? Let us look at Judges 16:28ff where we see that Samson finally is not so stubborn but calls upon God for the strength to defeat the Philistines (read 14:28-30). This he did by faith. Some of us are certainly stubborn; using the gifts and talents God has given us for our own personal pleasure and gain. Some may really wrestle with looking to God first rather than to self and wonder if they can every be used of the Lord. Let us thank God for the example of Samson, for God patiently worked through him a faith that ultimately brought glory to God. Prayerfully for the stubborn among us it will not take the gouging out of our eyes and imprisonment to walk by faith [by trust in the person, promises and provisions of God] rather than by sight [by doing what is right in our own eyes].

IV. The Failure and Faith of Jephthah

It seems like our list of names in this hero's hall of faith at this point go from the seemingly unlikely to the most improbable. Anyone familiar with the name of Jephthah and his story as recorded in Judges 11, knows of his rash vow, that upon the victory over the Ammonites and his return home, he would sacrifice whatever first comes through the doors of his house. There is a sense that like Barak, Jephthah was bargaining with God, trying to be clever and spiritual, but saying in effect, if the LORD would grant victory, then I will do this very spiritual thing [which was not so spiritual – the LORD never command him to do this] by sacrificing to you the first thing through my door. Jephthah was victorious in battle and according to Judges 11:34-35, the first “thing” through his door was his one and only daughter, which Jephthah, according to verse 39 offered according to the vow.

This presents us with quite a dilemma asking “Why did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter? Would God, who forbade human sacrifice, receive such an offering? Beloved, we are supposed to recoil from the monstrosity of Jephthah's actions. The later communality of Israel regarded this story as a clear example of improper behavior and inappropriate vow making. It serve as an example of what happens when God's people become confused in their thinking about who God really is and how God really works. It reminds us that God is not manipulated by vows and bargains.

This vow was an utter failure and yet we do know that the author of Hebrews calls this man an example of faith. How so? Remember that Jephthah was an illegitimate child, the son of a harlot, driven out by his half-brothers. But God had called him to defeat the Ammonites and by faith spoke to and then defeated the Ammonite oppression. How much greater would have been Jephthah's blessing if not for his thoughtless, careless vow? Let us be careful not to rashly vow something to the LORD not asked of us as it may well get us and others we love into difficult situations. Yet God patiently worked through Jephthah, causing his last remembrance in the Scripture to be a testimony of faith rather than failure.

V. The Failure and Faith of David

I know we are running out of time, but these next two names, the first being David, may well have made our personal “A” list of men of faith. It is interesting to find both David and Samuel's names associated as they are with Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, but I think the point is clear – that God works through his people and their personalities and their problems to bring about God glorifying faith. Did David have any failures that might cause some to wonder about his faith? Oh yes and we see in David, among other things, the failure

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of sensuality. David was often moved more by his senses than by faith. The most pointed and famous of examples was his sin with Bathsheba as recorded in 2 Samuel 11 (turn there) for here we see how sensuality caused him to fail. (Read 2 Samuel 11:1-4)

1 Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. 2 Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.

Look at the progress of David's sensuality. In verse 2 we see that sensuality invaded his thoughts, seeing Bathsheba bathing, he evidently took a good hard look at her and concluded in her mind that she was beautiful in appearance. David was also sensual in speech, for in verse 3 it said that he ***"inquired about the woman"*** – he is speaking openly about her. And finally we see his sensuality come to fruition, for what was conceived in the mind and expressed by his mouth was now acted upon as he committed adultery.

Are we not also plagued with the temptation of sensuality? Think about your last sin – did it not begin in the mind, a playing with the idea. Did it not find some means of expression and then action? Beloved, sin is born of desire...something desired more than a desire for the Savior. Sin is an unholy affection for the sensual, something that pleases your senses. Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Affection, indeed, is the motivation of the covetous man, the man who is greedy in worldly pursuits. The affections push the ambitious man forward in his pursuit of worldly fame. They activate the lustful man in his pursuit of pleasure and sensual delight." David desired his sin more than he desired his Savior. God made it clear that what David did was evil in His sight and it needed to be confessed, repented of and in David's case, first confronted by the godly prophet Nathan.

But did this great failure eliminate or erase faith in David. No – for the author of Hebrews calls David an example of faith. And while we don't have time to greatly consider it now, we do know that David defeated the giant Goliath, by faith (1 Samuel 17:47); that he became King of Israel by faith (2 Samuel 5:12) and according to 2 Samuel 8, David defeated the Philistines, the Moabites and the Arameans – all by faith. The point is this – do not let sensuality rob you of walking by faith. God patiently worked through David to ensure that faith would manifest itself in one as sensual as David.

VI. The Failure and Faith of Samuel

Our last example of faith is Samuel, who like David, might be readily seen as such an example. Changing things up a bit and starting with Samuel's faithful achievements, we find Samuel serving the LORD from his youth in the tabernacle at Shiloh. Additionally, we find Samuel faithfully and fearlessly proclaiming the word of the LORD, whether it be to Eli as a boy, or to confront a sinning King Saul who was being disobedient to God.

So, what was Samuel's failure? Samuel was from Ramah and he often made his way back there to be with his family (1 Samuel 7:17). But Samuel's sons, according to 1 Samuel 8:3, did not walk in the ways of Samuel, where dishonest and perverted justice. It is interesting that Samuel's sons became like his mentor Eli's sons – worthless fellows, not walking with the

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LORD. Where is the disconnect? How could the sons of the great prophet Samuel not be walking with the LORD? Well, let us first say that salvation is from the LORD, not from the parents. But with that said, could it be that Samuel did not spend enough time with his sons, to instill in them godliness? Could it be that Samuel was careless in his parenting? This man of faith, according to Hebrews 11:32 may have been weak in parental skills. Did Samuel contribute to their rebellion? Did he make sure that they were honoring him as their father? Did he make sure they were submitting to the authority of he and his wife? Were they submitting to the authority of the elders of the community?

Beloved, the point is, that even if you are struggling with the raising of your children, such is not a disqualifier of walking by faith. In fact it would be a call to greater dependence and looking to the LORD.

Conclusion – beloved, let us thank God that He patiently works through us to grant faith and to see that faith manifest itself to His glory. I pray that you might see yourself in one of these characters we looked at this morning and know that while you may struggle with doubt like Gideon; or with wanting to re-negotiate God's terms like Barak, or with being stubborn and head-strong like Samson, or being rash and foolish like Jephthah, or being sensual like David, or even of being careless like Samuel – that God is greater than our weaknesses and that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ (Philippians 1:6). Ask God to give you victory over your weaknesses and to let your faith glorify God in spite of your weakness.

With this said, there is one weakness that some may have this morning that needs special consideration. That weakness is willingly and with pride remaining in your sins. The word of the LORD is clear – the soul that sins will die – the wages of sin is death – eternal separation from the joyful presence of God. But the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ – that whoever calls upon the name of the LORD – who confess with his mouth Jesus is Lord [my master; my captain whom I will follow obediently] and believes in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, as a full payment for his sins – this one will be saved from self, granted faith to believe and follow Jesus Christ. To anyone who may be uncertain – do not doubt, do not negotiate, do not be stubborn, do not be rash, do not be sensual or careless but believe and receive Christ as Lord.

Soli Deo Gloria

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