

Great Chapter of Faith

We've come to the end of this great faith chapter... And it might be worth just doing a quick flyover of the chapter, at 10,000 feet.

Verses 1-2 tell us faith is the God given ability to trust in the future God has promised us - not the ability for us to create our own future. (READ).

Verse 6 instructs us that the object of our faith is in the true God - and so it points us to the nature and character of God. (READ verse 6). We must believe that he exists (or "is") and that he rewards those who seek him... Furthermore, verse 6 helps us see true faith "seeks God" or "draws near to him". And finally verse 6 tells us that this is **faith that pleases God, and therefore, "without faith it is impossible to please him..."**

And then the bulk of the chapter unfolds for us the men and women, who among others, make up this "great cloud of witnesses" or the "honor roll of the faithful" who lived "**by faith**".

The way this chapter ends might be a bit of a shock, because it essentially says, "By faith many suffered terribly." But it shouldn't surprise us. Remember the aim of the author. These were Christians who were suffering. Some were thrown into jail, others paid a hefty price for helping those thrown in jail. Some may have been facing death. And these Hebrew Christians were tempted to abandon their faith in Christ. The author wants them to be strong, to remain steadfast, to not drift, shrink back in their faith. **And so along with Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, the author mentions those whose names will be remembered in heaven forever because of what they suffered "by faith".**

Suffered By Faith

And though we will probably never suffer like these we will hear about today, it is important that we pay attention to this because the NT is clear that every Christian will suffer in some way for their commitment to Christ. Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:12 said, "*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" Peter, in 1 Peter 4:12 said, "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*"

Let's briefly look at verses 35-38 and see how these suffered "by faith". Verse 35 says, "*Others were tortured, not accepting their release...*" The word translated tortured tells us what kind of torture device was used. Put on a rack, stretched out, and tied to it and clubbed over and over again.

Verse 36 says, "others suffered mocking and flogging, chains and imprisonment". We know Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jeremiah 20).

Verse 37 says, "they were stoned". The prophet Zechariah was stoned in the courts of the Lord's house (2 Chronicles 24:21). Tradition tells us that Jeremiah was also stoned to death. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus describes Jerusalem as the city that "stoned the prophets that were sent to her". Verse 37 goes on to say, they were "sawn in two". Again, the tradition is that Isaiah the prophet was sawn in two.

They were killed with the sword. They went around in Skins of sheep and goats. They suffered deprivation due to hostility: destitute, afflicted, mistreated. They were outcasts on the run, wandering about in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth.

They all suffered "by faith". We look at this and might be tempted to think, "we'll I've never suffered like that," but then in the back of our minds "would I be faithful if called on to." Have you ever thought that?

Spurgeon - "It is hard for me to say while sitting in this comfortable home on this cushioned chair, but if the time came for me to burn for my Lord, I am sure he would give the grace for me to do so."

Though this probably won't ever happen to us, we do face all kinds of hardship and trials for which we can walk through and suffer through "by faith". We need to take the counsel of Spurgeon to heart and today determine with the strength and help of the Spirit, which we desperately need, that we will press on with Jesus no matter what, trusting he will give us the grace to endure just when we need it. Listen to how Corrie Ten Boom's father taught her this lesson. Corrie shares a conversation she had with her father in "The Hiding Place" where she asked her dad if they would have the courage to be strong even if caught.

"Father sat down on the edge of the narrow bed. "Corrie," he began gently, "when you and I go to Amsterdam-when do I give you your ticket?"

I sniffed a few times, considering this. "Why, just before we get on the train."

"Exactly. And our wise Father in heaven knows when we're going to need things, too. Don't run out ahead of Him, Corrie. When the time comes that some of us will have to die, you will look into your heart and find the strength you need-just in time."

Of Whom The World Was Not Worthy

No doubt, that is how God enabled these men and women to endure “by faith”. Notice what God says about these people. It is one of the most precious commendations of God’s people in the bible. Verse 38:

Of whom the world was not worthy...

The world was unworthy of these men and women of faith. Of course, the world considered these people unworthy - unworthy of life, dignity, respect, honor, comfort, and approval. According to the world, these were NOT the cool kids. The world felt itself diminished by the presence of these saints. And yet, the God of the universe, the Lord of glory said this. And his words are infinitely more important and valuable than anyone else’s. He said, “*The world is not worthy of these precious ones.*”

Have you ever heard the phrase, “being on the wrong side of history”? It is usually used as a manipulative or coercive way to get people in line: “You don’t want to be on the wrong of side of history do you?”

According to the world, these people were on the wrong side of history. Jeremiah, get with the program. Isaiah, come on, just fall in line! They were on the wrong side of history. Or were they? God doesn’t think so. The world was not worthy of them. History is the story of God’s redemptive purposes being worked for his glory. They were on the right side of history; their names will echo into eternity for the praise and exultation of God.

There are only two societies at the end of the day. Only two. Those who are “of the world” and those who are “of God”. There are only two cities. Only two: “the city of man” and “the city of God”. God says, “This world is not worthy of these... but heaven is. The world is not worthy of these, but I am. The city of man which is bound for destruction is not worthy of these, but the heavenly city is.”

Isn’t that all that matters? Don’t you want that said about you? Not because you are martyred for Christ - you probably won’t be - but because you have faith! What was it about these people? What fueled their life of faith to suffer by faith, such that the world was not worthy of them?

1) Their faith showed they longed for the praise of God, not the praise of others.

And all these though commended through their faith did not receive what was promised. (v. 38)

They were commended through their faith. What does that mean? God approved of them because of their faith. God was pleased with their faith. He loved their faith. This was stated at the very beginning of the chapter

in verse 2: *“For by it [faith] the people of old received their commendation.”* We saw this stated a little differently in verse 6: *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he is and that he rewards those who seek him.”* Without faith, it is impossible to please him. What pleases him? Faith!

And so the reason why God says, “The world is not worthy of these” is because their faith showed they wanted God’s approval, not the world’s. They wanted God’s praise, not the world’s. Their main aim was to please the Lord, not others... and not themselves. You see, living for the approval of others, the praise of the world strangles faith. It chokes the life out of faith. It kills faith. Actually, it makes real faith impossible. Listen to how Jesus put it in John 5:44:

How can you believe when you receive glory from one another, and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

That’s a rhetorical question. The answer is, you can’t. You can’t have saving, enduring faith while you are looking around for the approval, adulation, and praise of other people. Faith looks for the glory and praise that comes from the only God. That’s why *“the world was not worthy of these men and women.”*

2) Their faith showed they desired God’s eternal reward more than temporary relief from trouble

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise to a better life. (v. 35)

NASB says, *“obtain a better resurrection.”* A better life or better resurrection. The author is pointing us to the return of Christ, our “blessed hope”. For these suffering saints God’s eternal reward was so real. Hebrews 11:16 describes the faithful as those who *“desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God.”* God is proud to be called their God. And it is the same now. Those who by faith look to the eternal city and the glory of it, and desire it, and seek for it, can also by faith hear the loving words of God, “I am not ashamed to be called your God.”

So rich and full of power and glory is our future reward, that it actually significantly outweighs present suffering and hardship. Paul says that very thing in a couple of places: First in Romans 8:18, Paul says, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed.”* Paul suffered... massively. And he said it’s no comparison! And then in a more descriptive way, Paul says the following in 2 Corinthians 4:17: *“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”* They were tortured and refused release so that they might rise to a better life. Amazing. And those who live like this... the world is not worthy of them.

A Better Provision For Us

This is faith... an enduring faith. They suffered by faith, not losing their faith. And, amazingly they did not receive Christ - the promised Messiah. They received prophecies and promises of the coming Messiah. But they did not receive the Messiah, himself. Look at verse 39:

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

What was promised? What has God provided for us that is better? Christ, our Redeemer. Christ, the radiant Son. Christ, the faithful and merciful high priest who was made like us in every way. Christ the Mediator of the new covenant. Christ the apostle and high priest of our confession. You know what this means? Though we are waiting for Christ to come again, we have received what they longed for. The Lord Jesus said,

For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (Matthew 13:17)

We have a greater reason to believe, greater resources to run with endurance, a clearer hope to help us not shrink back in our faith. That's why Hebrews 12 tells us as we run the marathon of life, we look to what? Jesus *"the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility from sinners that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."* So that you may not shrink back, but have faith.

We look to Jesus. When? Now... and always. The life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ our high priest → Hebrews 7:25 - *"Christ is able to save to the uttermost, those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."* Fix your eyes on your perfect, sufficient, merciful Savior.

Fixing our eyes on him by faith. This enables us to persevere through whatever may come our way.