

*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, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.*

*39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.*

*1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Some of you listen to Greg Laurie on the christian radio station. I often catch a few minutes of his daily program as Pam and I leave our lunch time together on range and head our seperate directions.

Lately he's been advertising a yearly crusade that they have each year in the summer. Harvest Crusade. In fact as I type this on 17 August, they will be in their first day. It runs through today.

They'll get over 100,000 people in a stadium, so it's a modern version of the Billy Graham crusades in that way. Evangelistic.

They also made the national news. They had placed billboards in a fashion mall in Orange County, California. Pastor Laurie holding a black book in his right hand and speaking into a microphone. Billy Graham - ish. Waving the black book theatrically.

The ad had no religious symbols, just a black non-descript book, and it was informational, telling time and place and of the live music and some of the speakers at the Crusade.

They paid for a month, 2 ads in 2 different places in the mall, but the Irvine Co. who owns the mall took the ads down about 2 weeks into that month.

That ad, with a balding man holding a black book and speaking into a microphone was so intolerantly offensive to the people of Orange County that there were death threats.

The church offered to re-do the ad with no picture, no black book, no man speaking, just the information about the time and place of the crusade, but the Irvine Co. refunded their money and refused to let them put any kind of advertising at all, for any price.

The girl who wrote the newspaper article spoke of all the good for the entire community that happens as a result of the Harvest festival and Harvest Church. The homeless are fed and cared for. Other positive things for the entire community that come from it, but any good that comes pales in comparison to the offense of

christians being christians.

That is so offensive that the hungry can just stay hungry if that's the price to pay to be rid of them. Addicts can just stay addicts. Disfunctional families can stay disfunctional. No positive gain is worthy of tolerating the christians.

Actually, it's the black book that drives the world to derision. The hatred for the claims in that book drives otherwise sane people to do non-sensical things.

The idea that there is a God who owns everything, even them, and that He has moral authority over men and that He says He will destroy those who rebel against His rule and authority, those who are His enemies.

The hatred of that is vitriolic. It's the same hatred that caused the ruling jews to murder Jesus. Death threats. Over a billboard. Mercy.

Meanwhile, in other headline news, the cake baker in Colorado is being sued as a result of the same Colorado civil authorities that the Supreme Court defended him from, 7 - 2. The civil government of Colorado is doing exactly what the Supreme Court of the United States ruled against. Just weeks ago.

When you read about it a bit, you find out that this man gets called daily with requests to bake a cake with Satan on it and sex toys on top. Non stop harassment. Same caller ID. It's the very lawyer who represented the last folks.

They started their next case the very day that the supreme court agreed to hear the previous case. The attacks are like non stop waves beating against the land. Continuous harassment. In the

news. This week.

The revealed will of God is a thing to not only be hated vitriolically, but it is to be fought against with every weapon possible to men. Non stop.

If it was 1955, or 1962, we would be jaw dropped stunned. But in 2018 we're far enough down this road to look over the long expanse of history and realize, 1955 America was the anomaly, not 2018. In 2018 the battle is just getting back to normal.

It turns out, if you look down through all of recorded history, all the way back to Cain and Able, God's people have always been in harms way. The ruler of this world wants them eliminated. Period.

The crazed froth at the mouth behaviour of the world against God's people is perfectly reasonable if the ruler of this world and it's systems is the arch enemy of God.

Here's a scenario for you. Satan usurps control of this world, a control originally given to Adam which he forfeited when he disobeyed God. Satan says to Jesus in Luke 4; *I give the authority to reign to whomever I please, for it has been handed over to me.*

That's a lie. But it's never-the-less telling. Satan stole the authority to reign from Adam by tricking him into rebelling against God. It's a usurped, stolen authority that ultimately still belongs to God the Creator. But yes, he's temporarily in control.

Then he says, I give it to whomever I wish. Wrong. Jesus had something to say about that. Familiar words. Lord's prayer. Again.

"For, Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever."

Satan may be on the throne of this world for a while, but ultimately, Jesus says of His Father, Thine is the authority to reign, and the power to do it, with all the Glory, forever.

But for now, for the purposes of God's glory, it pleases Him to allow Satan to rule this world in terror as God calls a people out of it, for His own.

Satan is on the throne and he has the whole world duped, except God says, not this one, and this one, and this one . . . they are Mine. They belong to Me.

Does that begin to explain why a picture of a man with a black book that tells clearly of the situation I just described, is offensive to this world that is blinded and duped by Satan.

The Irvine Co. is lucky they got the offensive billboard down before there was a riot and people burned their buildings down to make that offense go away from their view.

It explains why a man in Colorado who clearly belongs to the God of heaven gets daily calls to bake cakes with images of Satan crushing God and sex toys on top.

Don't be shocked about any of it. The shocking thing was the 200 year hiatus in this nation when that wasn't the case. That was the anomaly, not what's happening now.

You say; where does the bible say that Jim? Turn with me if you will to Hebrews; chapter 11 and verses 32 - 40. Let's look together at normal treatment of God's elect people who find themselves in enemy territory with the command to tell others, "Good News!! You can come out of this perishing world and belong to the side that ultimately wins."

This is the author's grand finale for the chapter on faith. It's like the final big explosion at the end of the fireworks display. You go out with a huge bang and send multiple fireworks up so they all just explode and fill up the entire sky. That's what these final verses are.

*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, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.*

He says, if I were to take the time to tell every story of everybody who engaged the Devil in God's long war, using all of His saints, we could go on for ever! We'd run out of time.

It's similar to what the apostle John says in his final chapter of his gospel, his final words are; *24 This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

*25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.*

God has engaged Satan in a mighty battle on this real estate for all of the centuries since Adam's rebellion. Relentless. And God keeps records. Some day perhaps we'll get to see every miracle that God did in all the long centuries as He used His people, who belong to Him, in this war against the usurper of this world.

The author of Hebrews says, we'd run out of time if we just said one sentence about all of the victories God's people have seen in this war, as a result of God engaging the enemy through their faith.

Beloved, there is nothing more noble, more transcending of this world, more eternally lasting than when God, by faith, empowers you to make advances for His kingdom in this world.

And this author says, we'd run out of time if we kept going. He begins his abbreviated list right where he left off with Rahab. Actually there are huge gaps, he just highlights a very few in this chapter and then ultimately says, I can't mention all the heroes or we'd expire before it was done.

God is relentless in this war, and there has never been a gap when God was not at work in this world, using His elect, through faith, to advance His kingdom. Never. Time would run out.

But we have time to just remind ourselves of some of these heroes. If we were first century Jews, we'd be intimately familiar with each of these names.

But for us, we might have heard about them long ago in Sunday School and that's about all the exposure we might get. *For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,*

In the book of Judges a pattern emerges. We read the same thing over and over;

*Deuteronomy 31:16 And the LORD said to Moses, "You will soon rest with your fathers, and these people will rise up and prostitute themselves with the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake Me and break the covenant I have made with them."*

*Judges 2:11 And the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals.*

*Judges 3:7 So the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.*

*Judges 3:12 Once again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD. So He gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.*

*Judges 4:1 After Ehud died, the Israelites again did evil in the sight of the LORD.*

*Judges 6:1 Again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD; so He handed them over to Midian for seven years,*

*Judges 8:33*

*And as soon as Gideon was dead, the Israelites turned and prostituted themselves with the Baals, and they set up Baal-berith as their god.*

*Judges 10:6*

*And again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD. They served the Baals, the Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, Sidon, and Moab, and the gods of the Ammonites and Philistines. Thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.*

*Judges 13:1*

*Again the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.*

Same thing, over and over, not that the church is any better, and we are more to blame than Israel because we have the complete canon



of revelation at our fingertips, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

But the pattern repeats over and over. The children forget God and turn to the gods of the peoples around them and do evil. And then God turns the people over to be captives of other nations around them, and they are miserable and then they cry out and God raises up a Jephtha and a Barak and a Gideon and a Samson to go in and deliver them again.

And the Bible is very candid about all of these men. They were ordinary men with all the same weaknesses that we have. Samson was a mess. He's like a biblical super-hero, yet he can't leave the foreign women alone and he's reduced to a blind fool of a slave.

But even then, his faith in God is such that he brings a great defeat to the philistines by pulling their temple building down on top of them all.

Gideon isn't satisfied with one miracle to prove God is God, he needs 2. Actually, if you read the story it's more like 4, because before the 2 different fleece things, the Angel of the Lord had already appeared to him and made fire come up out of a rock to consume a sacrifice, and then vanishes but still speaks to him.

But then God uses him to bring a great defeat against the midianites and amelekites.

David and Samuel, we could study how God worked in them and through them, by faith, all winter long, there's so much. About how David was a man after God's own heart, but he fell miserably into sin with Bathsheba, and had her husband murdered.

God uses men of ordinary flesh, with all of the problems of fallen sinful humanity, to accomplish His purposes. Sometimes the sin is

so be-setting, they are set aside.

David for all his brilliance wasn't able to build the temple, God wouldn't let him because of his bloody hands. And then his children are a disaster. He's a lousy dad. It's all there for us to read, and yet God chose them and by faith, they transcended this world and accomplished mighty wonders in the war between God and Satan.

*33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.*

The antecedent in all of these things is faith. Faith in a God who does supernatural acts through the agency of painfully ordinary humans.

Faith conquered kingdoms. Faith performed acts of righteousness. Faith obtained promises. Faith shut up the mouths of lions. Faith quenched the power of fire.

*Faith escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection;*

None of those things could have happened by just the powers of the weak men that God used to do them. In every case, the glory goes to God who used ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

At this point perhaps you're thinking, get me some of that. Where do I get this faith that can raise the dead and put armies to flight?

I'd like to be invincible. Where do I sign up.

You'd better read the rest of the passage. Everything that God accomplishes, by faith, through ordinary people, advances His name and His kingdom.

But don't forget that Satan plays rough, and sometimes God is glorified by saints that sustain abject failure according to this world's standards, and even death while they fight for the glory of God and His kingdom.

Sometimes it gets ugly. Often it gets ugly. Often God is glorified when his saints are crushed and by faith they are like the perfume that comes from the crushing of the bark of the myrrh tree's bark.

The church at Smyrna in Revelation 2 is the most fragrant to God because they are being crushed. They were faithful unto death and they were like a fragrant aroma to God.

Persecuted and mis-treated saints who by faith remain faithful, are a sweet aroma to God.

*and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword;*

Satan plays rough. These are all things he loves to do to God's elect people. Torture. Mockings. Beatings. Prison. Different methods of murdering the saints. Stoning, swords, we might add in our modern times, both guns and crucifixion is popular again in the middle east.

Does that sound like what you signed up for? We hope it doesn't come to that, but in other lands, it already has, and our secular culture warriors could get there quickly. The intolerance of tolerance is frightening.

This book says, there's no guarantees. Evangelicalism is selling christianity as a guarantee of the very best this world can offer. Peace, tranquility, ease, wellness, prosperity. These are all things God guarantees to christians.

Oh? Really? That's what you signed up for? Prosperity and comfort and wellness and ease in this life? That isn't what this book teaches. This book says God's people suffer and endure; *they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated*

People, we live in a war zone. And we are the enemy combatants of this world. And we are massively out numbered.

Satan has lulled the church to sleep. He's singing a lullaby to the church, rocking the cradle, coddling the baby christians. It's actually far more dangerous, this slumber that I believe is a scheme of the Devil. As soon as we're all asleep he's going to light the tree on fire.

*they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated*

Those words describe enemy combatants of Satan. Not ease. Not comfort. Not prosperity, at least in this world. We get to enjoy ease and wellness and prosperity and comfort in the next world. Those things are an anomaly in this world. It's a scheme to catch christians off guard. Just be aware of that. Don't be caught off guard if it all goes away.

*they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated . . .* and I absolutely love these next words:

*38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.*

I rate these words on a level with what the angel told Daniel after he had struggled in prayer, in Daniel 10:11 *He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you."*

The angel sent to minister to Daniel says, Oh Daniel, you who are precious. Valuable to God. A precious valuable possession to God.

Those are the desires of my heart. I'm not even close, but how much I desire to be like Daniel, to be a precious possession, a valuable possession of God. *(men of whom the world was not worthy),*

Now there's something to aspire to. When it says this world was not worthy of them, it means exactly what it says. Men who, through faith, became the precious possessions of God, and this fallen world isn't worthy to even have them.

Folks, we honor all of the wrong hero's. The rock stars of this world should not be our hero's.

Men who belonged to God, who were rejected and mistreated by this world, who wandered about in sheepskins and goat skins and found shelter in caves and holes in the ground because this world was trying to kill them, *(men of whom the world was not worthy),* those should be the hero's we would want to emulate. Not the rock

stars of this world.

When the Lord Jesus Christ takes up residence inside your heart, and you become the property of the God of heaven; in some sense, even if it's just positional truth for now, you have transcended this world. You've been called out of this world. And even though you're still here, for a time, this fallen world isn't worthy to have you in its presence.

Positionally, in Christ, we are so vastly wealthy with all of the riches Christ is going to shower on us, this world isn't worthy to even host us.

We should live that way. We should at least understand that all the good things we're enjoying could be removed tomorrow, and we haven't moved out of what is normative for God's own possession who are dwelling in Satan's world.

I think I'm going to stop right there and we'll look forward to one more morning together in this hall of faith.