

Hebrews 11:32-40
(Matthew 24:3-14)
“Something Better”

Introduction

After studying this chapter for several months, I understand the author’s cry, “What more shall I say? Time would fail to tell any more stories of enduring faith.” In other words, if we don’t understand his point by now, we are not likely to get it. So he summarizes, and he does so with great wisdom.

He has given us illustrations of enduring faith from lives as diverse as Abraham, the Aramean Sheik from the great city of Ur in Mesopotamia, Moses, the sophisticated Hebrew educated in Pharaoh’s household, and Rahab, the prostitute who plied her trade in the city of Jericho in the Jordan River Valley. Most of the stories have been what this world would see as shining successes. Even Rahab ended up married to a leader of the royal tribe of Judah and ancestor of King David and Messiah Jesus.

Yet there is another side to the life of faith, one that often marked the prophets of Israel and that certainly marked our Lord and his disciples: namely, a life that this world might well see as crushing failure and defeat. And so, it is a good thing that in concluding this chapter, our author reminds his readers, who were facing persecution themselves, that the life of faith is demonstrated in all kinds of settings and circumstances, and that we must seek to understand what God is doing and would do through us in every place we find ourselves in life: times of joy and times of grief, times of victory and times of defeat.

He begins with those “who through faith conquered kingdoms,” but then turns to remember those who “suffered mocking and flogging, even chains and imprisonment,” even martyrdom, those “of whom the world was not worthy.”

Body

1. Stories of success (11:32-35a).

Negative potential: If this is all we hear, it may lead to triumphalism

Positive potential: The unique lessons learned through victory

2. Stories of suffering (11:35b-38).

Negative potential: If this is all we hear, it may lead to spiritual depression

Positive potential: The unique lessons learned through defeat

3. Living in the light of the future (11:39-40).

Here is the key to understanding the entire chapter: Whether in triumph or defeat, success or failure, life or death, what is promised by God to those of enduring faith has nothing to do with the way that things appear here and now. What we have been promised is life with God in the new heavens and the new earth, in “the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (11:10). Every victory here is but a picture of the great victory yet to come. Every defeat will teach us steadfast perseverance and develop Christ-like character within us. But all things are preparing us for the future and preparing the future for us.

Conclusion

This is one of the great surprises that we never would have guessed, if the Bible had not make the point repeatedly: the dead in Christ are not yet enjoying the fulfillment of God’s greatest promises to us. We will not be late to the party. Although they are free of pain and suffering and safely with the Lord, they are awaiting, along with the living, the consummation of human history, the great Day of the Lord, when wickedness, cruelty and oppression will be judged and banished forever, when the tears of those who have suffered greatly will be forever wiped away, and when the Lord makes all things new: new cosmos, new city, new humanity at last complete, our bodies made new and fit for eternity, glorified like the resurrected body of Jesus.

The life for which we have longed will at last be ours forever, the intimacy of unfailing love, the glory of creation unscarred by rebellion and sin, the worship for which we were created at last perfected in spirit and truth, and the missions that yet await and will fully employ our glorified gifts and abilities, us as we rule and reign with Christ. All this is yet to be for us and for those who have gone before us.

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 (11:39-40).