

Main Idea: We need heroes. That’s one of the reasons God gave us Hebrews 11. But pilgrims choose their heroes wisely. We should look for three things, according to Hebrews 11:29-40.

- I. Consider what these pilgrims did by faith (29-31).
 - A. The Hebrews crossed the Red Sea (29).
 - B. The Hebrews marched around Jericho (30).
 - C. The prostitute Rahab welcomed the spies (31).
 1. People with a sinful past can please God by faith.
 2. People who believe God take steps to obey God.
 - II. Consider what these pilgrims did through faith (32-38).
 - A. Some people experienced great gain for God (32-35a).
 1. The Lord gave national victories.
 2. The Lord gave personal victories.
 3. The Lord gave His people opportunities to trust Him and take Him at His Word.
 - B. Other people experienced great pain for God (35b-38).
 1. They looked up to the person of God (33a).
 2. They looked back to the promises of God (33b).
 3. They looked ahead to the resurrection (35).
 4. They refused to look around at the world (38).
 - III. Consider what these pilgrims experienced because of faith (39-40).
 - A. The ancients were commended.
 - B. The ancients were incomplete.
 1. God gave us something better.
 2. God gave us what every person needs, namely Christ.
- Make It Personal: Some questions for the pilgrim to ponder...
1. Whose faith am I following?
 2. Who is following my faith?
 3. Where is my journey taking me?

We are pilgrims, and I’d like to begin by reading the story of a pilgrim who demonstrated great faith.

Scripture Reading: Joshua 2

Several years ago NBA basketball star Charles Barclay appeared on a Nike ad and emphatically declared, “I am not a role model. I am not paid to be a role model. I am paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court. Parents should be role models. Just because I can dunk a basketball doesn’t mean I should raise yours kids.”

Barclay’s response generated a ton of reaction, both pro and con. He said he wasn’t a role model and he didn’t want people looking at him as such. Okay, so who are our role models these days?

The fact of the matter is, we do need role models, and not just for our kids either. The older I get the more I realize I need examples who can inspire me to live the kind of life that pleases God. I need heroes. We need heroes. And thankfully, what we need God has provided.

E.g.--

Thank God for brothers and sisters in Christ who remind us, in this age of trivial pursuits and shallow commitments that there is something, indeed *Someone* worth living and dying for.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Hebrews series preached at WBC in 2009.

It's so easy to start coasting in life, to get sucked into the downstream currents and forget that as followers of Christ, we're supposed to be going *upstream*. And if we're going to stand for Christ in a world that's hostile to His people, we need more than just information. We're going to need a steady dose of *inspiration*. And that's what a hero provides.

Right here is one of the main reasons God gave us Hebrews 11. We, just like the first readers of this letter, are pilgrims who need heroes. Some of the first readers were getting weary of the upstream swim. These persecuted Jewish Christians were thinking about going back to the comfortable ways of the Judaism they had left.

In Hebrews 1-10 the writer says, "Don't do that, for Christ is the fulfillment of all our forefathers anticipated. How could we abandon the very Messiah to whom our Scriptures point?"

Then in Hebrews 11 the writer turns to the Hebrew Scriptures for something else, not simply information, but *inspiration*. He wants to give his readers some heroes to follow, some heroes of faith to inspire them to persevere no matter what the cost.

We've seen several heroes thus far in our series, *Pilgrims in Progress*. The writer tells us about Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses' parents, and Moses himself. And now we come to the home stretch of the hall of faith.

As pilgrims, we need to choose our heroes wisely. According to Hebrews 11:29-40, we should look for three things.

Notice the structure of this passage. In verses 29-31 he emphasizes what some folks did *by faith* ("by faith" appears three times), in verses 32-38 what others did *through faith* (verse 33 mentions their accomplishments were "through faith"), and finally in verses 39-40 what happened *because of (or for)* their faith.

I. Consider what these pilgrims did by faith (29-31).

We've seen the phrase "by faith" more than a dozen times thus far in Hebrews 11. Here are three more. First, by faith...

A. The Hebrews crossed the Red Sea (29). "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned."

"The people" here refers to the Hebrews that Moses led out of bondage in Egypt fourteen centuries BC. "We're going to the promised land," Moses told them. But they soon faced one huge obstacle. Their exodus path took them right to the Red Sea, and with the Egyptian army behind them and not a boat in sight, there was simply no place to go. Their response? They cried out to Moses who in turn cried out to God who in turn told Moses in Exodus 14:15, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on." And so they did. They took God at His word and *by faith* marched ahead on dry ground between the walls of water. Once through, the Egyptian army tried to follow, but perished when the water collapsed on them.

You say, "But that's impossible! Water doesn't behave that way."

And you're right. But the God of the Bible specializes at doing the impossible for those who exercise faith. Jesus would later say in Matthew 21:21, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done."

Secondly, by faith...

B. The Hebrews marched around Jericho (30). "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."

Jericho was the first challenge the Hebrews faced once inside the land of promise. The place was shut up like a fortress. How would God's people ever penetrate that obstacle, let alone defeat it. Here's how. God told them (in Joshua 6) to march around the city once a day for six consecutive days, and then seven times on day seven. After the final trip around the city, the priests were to give a long blast on their trumpets and the people were to shout. Consequently, God said that the walls would simply collapse and the people could then take the city.

The people's response? They took God at His word and *by faith* did precisely what He told them to do, even though from a military standpoint it made no sense at all. But that's the way faith works, remember?

Faith is trusting in the person of God and acting on the promises of God, regardless how you feel. The Hebrews did exactly what God said, and consequently He did exactly what He said. In that same event, by faith...

C. The prostitute Rahab welcomed the spies (31). "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

It took a lot of courage for Rahab to hide the Hebrew spies. Her crime of treason, if discovered, would have cost her her life. But she took the risk because, by faith, she knew what was coming. She knew that her only hope to escape destruction was to connect herself to the good graces of these Hebrew spies, and she knew that because she believed in the Lord and in His promises.

We know that because of what Rahab told the spies in Joshua 2:9-11, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

Rahab did what she did because she *believed* in the Lord. She believed the Lord would do what He said He would do, namely give the land of Canaan to the Hebrews. And so, by faith she welcomed the spies and consequently was not killed with the rest of the Jerichoites.

Some people say, "I'm not the religious type. I'm too far gone to get right with God."

They need to look at Rahab. For starters, she was a non-Jew, a foreigner. There's strike one. Next she was a woman in a man's world. There's strike two. And finally she was a *prostitute*. There have been Bible scholars who struggled with the implications and suggested Rahab was actually a hostess or innkeeper. But the text specifically calls her "the prostitute" and uses a word that signifies a secular prostitute and not a temple prostitute.² There's strike three.

But the God of the Bible doesn't operate on the three-strike rule. The truth is, He works on the one strike rule. The soul that sins shall die. Rahab deserved to be out of the game. Indeed, she was out of the game. She was dead in her sins and enslaved to her sinful choices. She was a prostitute, heading for destruction.

But God spared her. On what basis? Did she clean up her life first and then present it to God? No. She turned to God, not on the basis of her merit, but the same way any descendant of Adam must come, *by faith*. Let this sink in, my friend...

² Observation by Leon Morris, p. 129.

1. *People with a sinful past can please God by faith.* “For by grace are you saved through faith.” God’s unmerited favor is administered through faith. There’s not a person in heaven who didn’t enter the pearly gates apart from grace through faith.

That’s why self-righteous people don’t go to heaven. They won’t admit their spiritual bankruptcy and therefore condemn themselves to eternal destruction. Jesus made it clear that He came to rescue the sinful sick, not the self-righteous healthy, declaring in Matthew 21:31-32, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”

Celebrate the grace of God today, my friends! If you’re in God’s forever family, it’s because of His grace. If you’re not yet in the family, there’s hope for you because of God’s all-sufficient grace!

I should emphasize that the title “the prostitute” described Rahab *before* she put her faith in the Lord. Once she identified with God’s people by faith, she left her life of sin. That’s what saving faith does. The New Testament calls Matthew “the tax collector” and Simon “the zealot,” but again, that’s what they *were* before they put their faith in the Lord. The reality is...

2. *People who believe God take steps to obey God.* Enabled by grace, they leave their life of sin and begin to pursue righteousness. James 2:25 commends Rahab because her God-fearing deeds proved the validity of her faith. According to Matthew 1:4-6, Rahab eventually married Salmon and gave birth to Boaz, the great-grandfather of King David and the ancestor of King Jesus.

Let me say it as plainly as I can. People who have blown it, if they’ll take God at His Word, can become people of great faith by the grace of God and for the glory of God! Since we’ve all blown it in God’s eyes, the question this morning is simply, will we take God at His Word? I love the way Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.”

My friend, will you say, “Yes!” to Christ today and enabled by Christ leave your life of sin and join the ranks of the pilgrim-heroes in Hebrews 11? It happens *by faith*. But it doesn’t stop there, so secondly...

II. Consider what these pilgrims did through faith (32-38).

Verses 32-33—“And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell³ about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who *through faith* conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised...”

Keep in mind that the first readers of this epistle knew their Bible, their “Old Testament Bible” to us. In these verses the writer merely mentions a series of names and events, knowing that each bring to his readers’ minds entire stories of God’s faithful provision.

It’s kind of like if I said, “Fourscore and seven years ago,” you would automatically think of Abraham Lincoln and what happened at Gettysburg. Or if I said, “I cannot tell a lie,” you’d probably think of George Washington and the cherry tree episode. Just one line brings to mind a whole story.

So it is in Hebrews 11. When the first readers read, “Who through faith conquered kingdoms,” they would have thought of David, for as Barclay points out that verb is one

³ There’s the challenge of an expository preacher. There’s always more to say than time will allow!

that the Jewish historian, Josephus, used of David. Barclay also points out that “administered justice” is the description of David taken from 2 Samuel 8:15, “who shut the mouths of lions” is a known reference, not surprisingly, to Daniel, and so on.⁴

As we scan the list we’re going to be reminded of people who against huge odds trusted in the Lord and overcame some overwhelming obstacles. The list is meant to inspire you, particularly if you’ve grown weary in the battle. Here are some heroes for you, two kinds of heroes to be precise. In our list...

A. Some people experienced great gain for God (32-35a). Notice again verse 32, “I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets.”

The first four men listed are from the period of the Judges. That’s significant, for that’s the time in Israel’s history when everyone “did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). But even during that time of apostasy, God preserved His remnant, men like Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah.

By the way, the six men listed here were by no means stained-glass sort of fellows. They had their flaws for sure. As Raymond Brown assessed, “Gideon was frightened, Barak was hesitant, Samson was flippant, Jephthah was rash, David was sensuous, and Samuel was careless.”⁵

It’s true. These are unlikely heroes. They each committed blunders that stained their lives, but you don’t have to be perfect to be a hero of faith, for it’s not the size of your faith but the size of your God that’s the issue. What made these men worthy of our attention was not who *they* were, but who their *God* was.

John Calvin had this to say about these men, encouraging words if you’re fainthearted at times like I am: “There was none of them whose faith did not falter... 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. There is no reason therefore why the fault from which we labour should break us or discourage us provided we go on by faith in the race of our calling.”⁶

Well said! So you blew it last week? Today begins a new week! There’s no reason why last week’s fault should break us provided we go on by faith in the race of our calling!

In verses 33-35a, the writer reminds us of some of the great gains that God accomplished through men and women of faith in the past. He begins by pointing out that...

1. The Lord gave national victories. Notice verse 33, “Who through faith conquered kingdoms”—that applies to David in 2 Samuel 8, Gideon in Judges 7, Barak in Judges 4, Samson in Judges 14, and Jephthah in Judges 11. They all, through faith, conquered rival kingdoms that threatened the people of God.

Others, through faith, “administered justice” (lit. “performed righteousness”). Samuel and David did that. So did Daniel and Nehemiah. Each of those men used their political positions to bring about justice.

And that’s what we’re seeking as we vote on Tuesday, leaders who will bring about justice. Pray that God will raise them up. And get involved in the process by voting.

⁴ William Barclay, p. 164.

⁵ Raymond Brown, p. 221.

⁶ John Calvin, p. 182.

Others “gained what was promised.” Joshua certainly did that for by faith he led the people into the promised land. Caleb did the same, for by faith he took a mountain of God’s promised land at the age of eighty-five. In addition to national victories...

2. *The Lord gave personal victories.* Through faith, some “shut the mouths of lions,” says verse 33. Daniel, of course, did that, but so did Samson and David before him.⁷

According to verse 34, others through faith “quenched the fury of the flames.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego certainly did, for although the Babylonian king threw them into the fiery furnace, they came out without even the smell of smoke on them.

Still others “escaped the edge of the sword”—like Jephthah (Judges 12:3), David (1 Sam. 18:11; 19:10), Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-2), and Elisha (2 Kings 6:14-17). In fact, David not only escaped the sword, but actually used Goliath’s own sword to remove his head!

Next the writer refers to those “whose weakness was turned to strength.” Perhaps he has in mind Samson who, after blowing it with Delilah, regained his strength at the end of his life and slew the Philistines in the temple of Dagon (Judges 16:28-30).

God doesn’t need our strength. He provides it.

Then there were others “who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.” That reminds me of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20, who, when attacked by an immense army from Edom, cried out to the Lord and said, “We do not know what to do but our eyes are on you (20:12).” And God granted an incredible, miraculous victory!

Verse 35 tells us, “Women received back their dead, raised to life again.” That happened to the widow at Zarephath whose son died and was raised from the dead by the Lord in answer to Elijah’s prayer (1 Kings 17:17-24). Something similar happened to the Shunamite woman, the one who gave Elisha a prophet’s chamber. In that very room Elisha called on the Lord and the Lord raised that dead son back to life (2 Kings 4:6-37).

Did you notice in these examples that the heroes of faith didn’t go seeking the challenges they faced? They were simply seeking to live for God when the Lord placed an obstacle in their path, an obstacle which became *a choice*. The choice? Will you trust me? Will you believe that I intend to do something through you for my glory?

Yes, in each of these situations, there’s a common theme. Do you see it? In each...

3. *The Lord gave His people opportunities to trust Him and take Him at His Word.* That’s what our obstacles are to God, simply opportunities for Him to put His sufficiency on display. A job loss. A health challenge. Conflict at home. These are all opportunities. But to see God work through those opportunities, we must believe Him, for He works *through faith*.

Sometimes when He works, there’s great gain. Sometimes He shuts lions mouths and rescues from the fire and raises dead sons. That’s what He does for people who believe Him...*sometimes*.

But sometimes He brings glory to Himself in a different way, as the writer of Hebrews illustrates in verses 35b-38. Great gain? Yes, for some, but...

B. Other people experienced great pain for God (35b-38). What kind of pain? Verses 35 tells us, “Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.” The Greek word for “tortured” (*tympanizo*) is the basis for the word tympany, a kind of drum that was an instrument of punishment. That’s what

⁷ I’m grateful for several suggestions by Robert Gromacki as to which Old Testament figures the writer of Hebrews had in mind; p. 194.

happens to some people who exhibit faith. They're strapped to a drum and tortured, and when given the option to recant, they decline.

That brings to mind John Bunyan who was told, "You can leave prison if you'll simply promise never to preach again." His response? "If you release me today, I will preach tomorrow." And so he spent twelve years behind bars, during which, in the mystery of God's good providence, he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Sometimes pain is the means to the greatest gain.

Verse 36—"Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison." Warren Wiersbe said it well, "It takes more faith to *endure* than it does to *escape*."⁸ Did you ever notice how many godly people spent time in prison in the Bible? Joseph, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hanani (2 Chron. 16:10), John the Baptist, Peter, James, Paul, Silas, John, and Timothy did.

The examples of great pain continue in verse 37, "They were stoned." Jesus specifically pointed out the Jewish forefathers "stoned" some of the prophets (Matt. 23:37; Luke 11:48). According to a widely accepted tradition, Jeremiah was stoned by fellow Jews in Egypt.

"They were sawed in two [unthinkable, yet tradition says that Isaiah was cut in two by wicked king Manasseh]; they were put to death by the sword [in Luke 11:51 Jesus referred to the blood shed by Zechariah who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary]. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated."

The "health and prosperity" preachers don't typically mention this part of the story. "If you have faith, God will bless you," they say. Indeed, He will, yet the blessing may come in the form of prison, or flogging, or running for your life, or being run through by a sword. Through faith, some of our forefathers experienced great gain for God, but for others it was great pain. Some did great things for God, others endured great things for God. Sometimes through faith you overcome, but sometimes through faith you are overcome.

Verse 38 concludes, "The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."

Again, the first readers knew precisely who these phrases depicted. It's not just because they knew the Old Testament. They also knew the intertestamental stories of heroes in the Maccabean struggle, and those stories may well be referenced in Hebrews 11.

Let me tell you a little bit about these heroes, borrowing some historical descriptions from William Barclay...

Around the year 170 B.C. a king by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes ruled in Syria. This king "had an abnormal love for all things Greek and saw himself as a missionary for the Greek way of life," as Barclay puts it. He tried to force the Jews to abandon their Jewishness, to *hellenize* them. Some obeyed him, but many resisted.

In 168 B.C. Antiochus attacked Jerusalem and captured it, killing 80,000 Jews and selling 10,000 into captivity. What's more, he took over the Jewish temple and offered sacrifices of swine flesh to Zeus. In addition, he prohibited circumcision and the possession of the Hebrew Scriptures. He also ordered the Jews to eat unclean meats and to make sacrifices to the Greek gods. If they defied him, they (in the words of Josephus)

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, p. 321.

“underwent great miseries and bitter torments; for they were whipped with rods and their bodies were torn to pieces; they were crucified while they were still alive and breathed.”⁹

So the first readers of this epistle knew this background, for they were *Jewish* Christians. As such, they would have known two famous stories taken from The Book of Fourth Maccabees.¹⁰

The first is the story of an aged priest named Eleazar who was brought before Antiochus and ordered to eat swine. The king stated, “Before I begin to torture you, old man, I would advise you to save yourself by eating pork, ⁷ for I respect your age and your gray hairs....”¹¹

To this Eleazar replied, “We, O Antiochus, who have been persuaded to govern our lives by the divine law, think that there is no compulsion more powerful than our obedience to the law. ¹⁷ Therefore we consider that we should not transgress it in any respect... ²⁷ It would be tyrannical for you to compel us not only to transgress the law, but also to eat in such a way that you may deride us for eating defiling foods, which are most hateful to us. ²⁸ But you shall have no such occasion to laugh at me, ²⁹ nor will I transgress the sacred oaths of my ancestors concerning the keeping of the law, ³⁰ not even if you gouge out my eyes and burn my entrails... ³⁷ My ancestors will receive me as pure, as one who does not fear your violence even to death. ³⁸ You may tyrannize the ungodly, but you shall not dominate my religious principles, either by words or through deeds.”¹²

You can guess what happened next. The guards stripped the old man, then flogged him until his blood flowed and he fell to the ground. Then a guard kicked him to make him get up. Mercifully, someone even offered him meat that wasn't pork, told him to eat it pretending it was pork just to save his life. But still he refused. In the end they took him to the fire and threw him in, where he died, declaring, “I am dying in burning torments for the sake of the law.”

Are we that serious when it comes to obeying the Bible?

There's another story the first readers surely knew, also told in Fourth Maccabees, the story of the seven brothers. Seven Jewish brothers were given the same choice as Eleazar, and the same threats if they resisted. The guards placed before them the tools of torture: wheels and joint-dislocators, rack and hooks and catapults and caldrons, thumbscrews and iron claws and wedges and bellows. The brothers' response? They stated, “Why do you delay, O tyrant? For we are ready to die rather than transgress our ancestral commandments.”

And die they did, one at a time. The executioners lashed the first brother with whips and tied him to the wheel until he was dislocated and fractured in every limb. Then they set him on fire, but he remained faithful to the end. They bound the second brother to the catapults and tore his skin off. He too died faithful. They used wracks to wrench the third brother's body, then flayed him. They cut out the fourth brother's tongue before administering other tortures. They tore apart the fifth brother on the wheel, as they did the sixth, in addition to roasting him. And the seventh in a gigantic frying pan. They all died faithful, and if you can imagine, they did it with their mother watching.

⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 12:5, 4; quote taken from William Barclay, p. 168.

¹⁰ Dated sometime between the first century BC and AD 70. The book was ascribed to Josephus by Eusebius and Jerome.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (4 Mac 5:6-9)

¹² *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (4 Mac 5:16-38)

As William Barclay concludes, “These are the things of which the writer to the Hebrews is thinking; and these are things which we do well to remember. It was due to the faith of these men that the Jewish religion was not completely destroyed. If that religion had been destroyed, what would have happened to the purposes of God? How could Jesus have been born into the world if the Jewish religion had ceased to exist? In a very real way we owe our Christianity to these martyrs of the times when Antiochus made his deliberate attempt to wipe out the Jewish religion.”¹³

You say, “How did they do it? How did these pilgrims in Hebrews 11 leave behind such a testimony?” The writer gives us four clues tucked away in this text.

1. *They looked up to the person of God (33a).* Verse 33 says, “Through faith” they did this. Faith, says verse 6, is believing that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. That’s what these heroes did. They looked up to the person of God.

2. *They looked back to the promises of God (33b).* Verse 33 tells us they “gained what was promised.” These men and women not only looked up but also looked back. They knew God’s promises and lived by them.

3. *They looked ahead to the resurrection (35).* Verse 35 says that when tortured they refused to be released “so that they might gain a better resurrection.” Like our Savior, they knew that death wasn’t the end. They knew the resurrection was coming, and they *lived for it*.

4. *They refused to look around at the world (38).* “The world was not worthy of them,” says verse 38. These heroes didn’t live to fit in, for they had a higher agenda. John Calvin said it well, “We must only live so as to live to God, and whenever we cannot live to God we must gladly and willingly meet death.”¹⁴

Let there be no misunderstanding. It wasn’t their suffering that saved them. These pilgrims were sinners just like us, and the fact that they lived well and died well didn’t merit God’s favor. Oh yes, they were saved by suffering, but it wasn’t their suffering. They were saved by the suffering of the One who suffered in their place, as the writer explained back in Hebrews 2:9, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor *because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*”

So yes, suffering is necessary for salvation, but it’s not our suffering. It was His. Christ went to the cross, tasted death for undeserving sinners, then conquered death on the third day. What God requires of you and me is simply *faith*. Will we put our faith, hope, and trust solely and entirely in the One who suffered for us?

III. Consider what these pilgrims experienced because of faith (39-40).

Verses 39-40 tell us, “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” We’re told two things about these ancients.

A. The ancients were commended. For what? For their faith. Yet though commended...

B. The ancients were incomplete. The Old Testament saints of Hebrews 11 didn’t receive what God promised. They died waiting for it. But the writer makes it clear that their waiting is now over. That’s because...

¹³ William Barclay, p. 170.

¹⁴ John Calvin, p. 184.

1. *God gave us something better.* That's the message of Hebrews.
2. *God gave us what every person needs, namely Christ.* You see, these Old Testament heroes were made perfect the same way we are in this New Testament age. It's by faith in Jesus and His sacrifice, for He is the *perfecter of our faith*, as we'll see when we come to Hebrews 12:2. As Robert Gromacki explains, "Both the Old Testament people of God ('they') and the New Testament church ('us') share equally in the spiritual provisions of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant."¹⁵

Make It Personal: Some questions for the pilgrim to ponder...

1. *Whose faith am I following?*

Charles Barclay once made it clear he doesn't want to be your hero. That's fine. The Lord has given us other heroes, like the woman in Sudan I read about who risked her life to hear God's Word, like Gideon, David, Eleazar, the seven brothers, and host of others who were willing to die for their faith.

The question is, are these the kind of heroes we are following?

I googled the most popular people in the world and found a listing. Eight of the top ten were pop singers and the other two were actors. It's a revealing fact that some of us know more about Tom Cruise than we do about Thomas in the Bible, that we can find time to check out Facebook but we can't seem to find time to read Jim Elliot's biography, that we make it a point to hear what Bill O'Reilly thinks about the political process but refuse to study the classics of Christian thinkers like Kuyper and Bonhoeffer.

The real question is, who are our heroes? I urge you to pick your heroes wisely and then study your heroes carefully. Get to know Abraham and Moses and Daniel. Are you interested in sports? Then get to know Eric Liddell and C. T. Studd. In business? Then R. G. LeTourneau and Cyrus McCormick. In the military? Then Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. These pilgrims took their faith into the real world and they're worthy of our attention.

2. *Who is following my faith?*

Raymond Brown had this to say about the heroes in Hebrews 11, "If these courageous and devout sufferers achieved so much when, comparatively speaking, they had so little, then there must be no limit to our service. The opportunities are innumerable and the resources are limitless."¹⁶

Who is there in your life that, by God's grace, is following your faith? Who are you investing in, who are you modeling Christ for?

3. *Where is my journey taking me?*

Are you living to gain a better resurrection? That's the perspective of the pilgrim. Is it yours? Are you living in a way that will matter most on resurrection day?

¹⁵ Robert Gromacki, p. 195.

¹⁶ Raymond Brown, p. 225.