

April 3, 2011 by Steve Brandon



Acts of Faith

Hebrews 11:33-38

1. Victorious Faith (verses 33-35a)
2. Persecuted Faith (verses 35b-38)

I invite you to open your Bible to the book of Hebrews. For the past few months, we have been looking at chapter 11. It's the faith chapter. The expression, "by faith" is mentioned 19 times in these verses. It's obviously the theme of this chapter.

The original hearers needed to be reminded that faith is the way that everyone has ever come to God. You go back in Biblical history, as far as the first children. You go ahead in history to your grandchildren's grandchildren. Faith is the only way that anyone ever comes to God. We don't come to God by our works. We don't come to God by our own goodness. We don't come to God by our talents. We don't come to God by our parents. No -- we come to God by faith.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God, must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek him." We come to God through faith. We come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that He has accomplished our salvation for us completely. There is nothing that we lack. "In Him you have been made complete!" (Col. 2:10) says Paul.

Well, this morning, we come to verse 33 in our exposition. Until this point, our focus has primarily been upon people and the wonderful ways in which they trusted in the LORD. All you have to do is walk through the text and you see names like Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Rahab and Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David. But, here in verse 33, we see a change. No longer are there names of people. Rather, we see here that there are deeds -- things that men of faith have accomplished through their faith.

Now, it's not that those named didn't accomplish some great things by their faith. Oh, they did. Abel worshiped. Noah witnessed. Abraham left his home. Moses rejected the treasures of Egypt. Jericho was conquered. Rahab was saved. By their deeds, we see their faith. The change here in verse 33 is that it's all about the things that people accomplished through faith. There are no names. And in many instances, multiple people accomplished the same things.

Let's begin reading in verse 33, ...

Hebrews 11:33-35

who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 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. Women received back their dead by resurrection; ...

We see here example of victorious faith.

Well, let's get into the text. My first point is this, ...

1. Victorious Faith (verses 33-35a)

This comes in verses 33-35a. In these verses, we see great things accomplished. Particularly, we see 10 examples of victorious faith.

1. Conquered Kingdoms
2. Performed Acts of Righteousness
3. Obtained Promises
4. Shut the Mouths of Lions
5. Quenched the Power
6. Escaped the Edge of the Sword
7. From Weakness Were Made Strong
8. Became Mighty in War
9. Put Foreign Armies to Flight
10. Receiving back the dead by resurrection

Let's just work through them, on by on.

1. Conquered Kingdoms

There are many in the time of the Old Testament who conquered kingdoms. By faith, Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer and rescued Lot (Gen. 14). By faith, Joshua lead the people into the Promised Land (Joshua 1-9) By faith, Jonathan defeated the Philistines (1 Sam. 14). By

faith, David defeated the Philistines (1 Sam 17). By faith, David defeated Moab and Zobah and Ammon and Aram (2 Sam. 8,9). By faith, David smashed Sheba's revolt (2 Sam. 20). By faith, Jehu defeated the house of Ahab (2 Kings 9). By faith, Hezekiah turned back the onslaughts of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19). That is but to name a few.

Let's move on. We see victorious faith in those who ...

2. Performed Acts of Righteousness

How many people can you think of in the Old Testament that "performed acts of righteousness"? There are too many to count!

But, you get the sense, here, that the writer is talking about those who did right in a society of wickedness. The judges come to mind -- those who entered onto the scene and delivered a country out of the wickedness that had brought them low. Of Samuel, the last judge, it was said, that he had not defrauded or oppressed the people of Israel all his days (1 Sam. 12:4).

Yet, this may be talking about the kings who administered justice. Like David, who "reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people" (2 Sam. 8:15). Like Solomon, who administered justice from the wisdom of God that was given him (1 Kings 3:28). Like Jehoshaphat, who appointed judges in all the land and charging them to judge according to God's righteousness (2 Chron. 19:5-7).

Or, it may be talking about the kings who brought sweeping reforms in their land like Hezekiah, who destroyed the idols and re-instituted the Passover (2 Chron. 30-31); like Josiah, who repaired the temple and found the law and submitted himself and the entire nation to teaching found in the law (2 Chron. 34). All of these men stood against the tide and by faith, made a stand for righteousness.

So, we too ought to make a stand for righteousness. We ought to live righteously and pursue justice and mercy.

Thirdly, we see victorious faith in those who ...

3. Obtained Promises

Again, we have an incredibly general statement, which was experienced by many in Old Testament days. When Joshua took the land, he said to the elders of Israel: "Not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed" (Josh. 23:14). God told Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men" (Judges 7:8). And so, by faith, they conquered Midian. God told Hezekiah, "I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria" (Isa. 38:4). And by faith, God did just that..

When God makes a promise, you can take it to the bank. Many in the Old Testament days received promises from God and saw them fulfilled.

We see victorious faith in those who ...

4. Shut the Mouths of Lions

Of course, Daniel comes to mind, doesn't he? When the jealous commissioners sought to bring Daniel down, they made a decree that anyone who prays to any god, but the king be thrown into the lion's den. Of course, Daniel disobeyed this edict. In faith, he prayed to the LORD, his God. When thrown into the lions' den, he was safe and sound, because God sent His angel to shut the lions' mouths (Dan. 6:22). By faith, Daniel shut the mouths of lions.

But, this phrase may refer to others. There were others who shut the mouths of lions. Samson tore a lion to pieces with his bare hands (Jud. 14:6). David killed a lion with his sling as he was out in the pasture (1 Sam. 17:36).

We see victorious faith in those who ...

5. Quenched the Power of Fire

Of course, this is referring to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Rather than bowing down to the image that Nebuchadnezzar had made, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego all stood in defiance. The punishment was that they were cast into the fire. Listen to their statement of faith. They answered the king, ...

Daniel 3:16-18

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

And so, into the furnace they went. But, the fire did not harm them. Instead, they "walked about in the midst of the fire without harm" (Dan. 3:25). When they were taken out, the fire had no effect on their bodies. Not a hair was singed. Nor were their clothes damaged. Nor was there even the smell of fire on them.

We see victorious faith in those who ...

6. Escaped the Edge of the Sword

This was often the case with David, who fled the ravages of Saul, who sought to kill him on more than one occasion. Elijah fled when Jezebel sought to kill him (1 Kings 19). Elisha fled when the king of Israel wanted to kill him during a famine (2 Kings 6). Ezra and his caravan were given a safe journey to Jerusalem when they refused the king's protection, but sought protection from the LORD (Ezra 8:21-23). Those who built the wall in Nehemiah's day were protected from harm, even though they built with one hand doing the work and the other hand holding a

weapon (Neh. 4:17). There are plenty of saints down through the ages, who escaped alive.

We see victorious faith in those who ...

7. From Weakness Were Made Strong

Remember the war with Amalek? When Moses held his hand up, Israel prevailed, but when he left his hand down, Amalek prevailed (Ex. 17:11). But, Moses' hands were heavy. He needed Aaron and Hur to hold up his hands for him (Ex. 17:12). This was strength in weakness.

Gideon's 300 men conquering Midian is a good example of this. Samson's strength which came back to him, enabling him to topple the pillars in the building is a good example of this (Judges 16). There is the story of David, the youngest of Jesse's children, becoming the king of Israel. Hezekiah was about to die, but God granted him another 15 years of life (Isa. 38). The Hebrew young men who had been taken into exile chose not to eat the king's choice food, yet their appearance seemed better than those who had been eating the king's food (Dan. 1:8-16).

We see victorious faith in those who ...

8. Became Mighty in War

Remember Rahab's testimony of Israel? "We have heard ... what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed" (Josh. 2:10). Certainly, Joshua was "Mighty in War," as he and his army took the land of Canaan.

David is certainly high on this list. The song rang out in Israel, "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). David was so successful in his military exploits that Solomon, his son enjoyed "dominion over everything ... and ... had peace on all sides around about him. ... Judah and Israel lived in safety, every man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:24-25). And the reason for the expansive peace was because of the mighty victories in war that David and his mighty men achieved (2 Sam. 23).

We see victorious faith in those who ...

9. Put Foreign Armies to Flight

Again, Gideon comes to mind. Doesn't he? His 300 men blew trumpets and banged pots, and the Midianites fled their presence. During the days of Elisha, the king of Aram had surrounded Samaria, seeking to starve them out. But, during the night, "the Lord had cause the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, even the sound of a great army. ... [So] they arose and fled in the twilight and left their tents and horses ... and fled for their life" (2 Kings 7:6-7).

Hezekiah and Isaiah also come to mind. Jerusalem was surrounded. So Hezekiah and Isaiah prayed to the LORD. And "the LORD sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria" -- 186,000 of them. (2 Chron. 32:20-21; 2 Kings 19:35). This sent the Assyrians on their way home (2 Kings 19:35).

Finally, we see victorious faith in those women who were ...

10. Receiving back their dead by resurrection

Two stories come to mind here. The first was during the days of Elijah. In his travels, he used to stay with a widow in Zarephath. When her son died, Elijah "stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, 'O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him'" (1 Kings 17:21). He came back to life.

The second comes during the days of Elisha. He also knew a widow, the Shunammite, whose son had died. Elisha prayed to the LORD (2 Kings 4:33). Then, "He lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm" (2 Kings 4:34). And He came back to life.

Such are examples of victorious faith of those who lived during the days of the Old Testament. We could certainly name many more. Here's the lesson to learn: don't ever think that faith is a weak and powerless thing.

I believe that the original hearers needed such a reminder. They had come out of their Judaism and into the church. Some were believing in Jesus. Some were merely checking things out. They were being pulled back into a religious system in which, it was claimed, there was power. There was the temple and the priests and the Old Covenant and Moses and the law. But, these people had forsaken all of that and had come into the church, where none of this was visible. And yet, all of the saints who came before them lived by faith. They didn't entrust themselves to the rituals of the temple. They didn't trust the power of the priests. They weren't victorious in their exploits because of the power of the law. No, everyone who lived a life of victory lived a life of faith in the unseen.

So, you don't need the physical temple -- Jesus is our temple. You don't need the priests -- Jesus is our great high priest. You don't need to hold onto the Old Covenant - Jesus has brought in the New Covenant. You don't need to hold onto Moses -- Jesus is better than Moses. You don't need to hold onto the law -- the law has become obsolete (Heb. 8:13).

What do you need? You need the same thing that God's people have always needed. You need faith! You need to believe in the power of Jesus Christ. You want to live a victorious life? Trust in Jesus.

Now, sadly, this is often the only thing that is ever preached in some churches. It is as if Jesus is this magical solution to a prosperous and successful and wealthy life. The effect of such preaching is that disappointment can easily come, as you see defeat in your life, as you see suffering in your life, as all doesn't turn out the way that you envisioned. The good news for us this morning is that Hebrews 11 doesn't end here with a victorious faith that many of us never quite seem to achieve. Hebrews 11 goes on to look at another aspect of faith, which is often

the reality of our lives.

Not only do we see Victorious Faith (verses 33-35a). But, my second point is that we also see ...
2. Persecuted Faith (verses 35b-38)

I say this because of the change in the second half of verse 35,. Beginning in verse 33, we saw the victories of faith: conquering kingdoms, obtaining promises, shutting the mouths of lions, quenching fire, escaping death, being mighty in war. It's all good. It's all happy. It's all great. It's the sort of stories that fill our hearts with longings to share in their victories.

But, in the middle of verse 35, we see a change. No longer are these people conquering and winning great victories. No longer are there great stories of success. Rather, we see them experiencing the pains and persecutions that come as a result of their faith. Look at what you see, ...

Heb. 11:35b-38 35

... and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 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 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Here we see people being tortured and mocked and whipped and chained and imprisoned and stoned and sawn in two and put to death. We see them being destitute, afflicted, and ill-treated. We see them wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. Why did they suffer so? Because of their faith and because they trusted God. Had they denied their faith, none of these things would have happened.

Look at verse 35, "and others were tortured, not accepting their release." These people had a choice. It was said to them, "You can be tortured for your faith, or you can be released. You choose." And they chose torture. How can that be? It can only be because their release meant that they would have to deny Christ. And because of their faith, this is something that they would never do.

It's like the case of John Bunyan. John Bunyan spent 12 years off and on in prison, because he refused to stop preaching. He would have been released from prison the moment he promised not to preach. But, he made his intentions clear. At one of his trials, he said point blank, "If you release me today, I will preach tomorrow." He made his choice. He took his stand. He paid for it in prison.

So also did these people make their choices as well. It was the choice of faith. Their faith compelled them to fear God rather than men. Their faith compelled them not to fear "those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28). They had their soul in mind. This can be seen at the end of verse 35, where the reason why they chose torture over freedom, "that they might obtain a better resurrection."

These Old Testament saints had their eyes on the future. They had their eyes beyond the grave. They had a hope that they would be raised to life.

There's a great story told in the Apocrypha in the book of 2 Maccabees, which records some of the history between the time of the Old and New Testaments. "An almost 90 year old scribe named Eleazar was put on the rack and endured blows that led to his death." [\[1\]](#) He said, "It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him." [\[2\]](#)

Such profession of faith came from one who didn't fully understand the resurrection. Jewish understanding of the resurrection was fuzzy at best. The Old Testament doesn't say much about it. But, it says enough for Martha, the sister of Lazarus, to say, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (John 11:24). On the other hand, the New Testament abounds in resurrection hope (which we will celebrate in 3 weeks). As Christ was raised from the dead, we too will raise to eternal life. Or, as Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25).

And yet, sketchy as their understanding was, we find that by faith, saints who lived in the days before Christ looked forward to the resurrection which strengthened them to endure the suffering they experienced for their faith. So also ought we to be strengthened to be persecuted for our faith as well.

Let's work through verses 36, 37, and 38.

Hebrews 11:36

and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

We know of several prophets in the Old Testament who faced these sorts of things. When Jeremiah prophesied of Judah's defeat at the hands of Babylon, he was accused of being a traitor (Jer. 37:14). When Jeremiah denied it, "the officials were angry at Jeremiah and beat him, and they put him in jail" (Jer. 37:15). We don't know how long he spent in prison, only that it was "many days" (Jer. 37:26).

That was just one of several times that Jeremiah was held captive against his will. On another occasion Jeremiah was thrown into an empty cistern. He had to be pulled out of there with ropes (Jer. 38:1-13). On another occasion, he was beaten and placed in stocks (Jer. 20:1-3).

Micaiah was another prophet who was persecuted at the hands of the king he served. When Micaiah prophesied against King Ahab, he was

struck on the cheek and thrown in prison and fed sparingly (1 Kings 22:24-26).

Would the entire history of Israel be told, I am sure that there would be many other reports just like this. There would be reports of those who stood for what was right, who proclaimed the word of the Lord, and faced abuse and imprisonment for it. But, the reality is that most history focuses upon the good. The names of most of those who suffered for the LORD are often forgotten in the history books. But, they are never forgotten in the eyes of the LORD.

Verse 37 continues the theme, ...

Hebrews 11:37

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

We have several examples of those who were stoned to death in the Old Testament. One of the examples that stands out is Naboth, the Jezreelite, a righteous man, who owned a vineyard. When he refused to sell the vineyard to Ahab, the wicked queen, Jezebel, conspired against Naboth. She hired a few men to testify falsely against him that he blasphemed the LORD. Though he was completely innocent, "they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones" (1 Kings 21:13).

Zechariah, who preached against the sin of the people of Israel, was "stoned ... to death in the court of the house of the LORD" by decree of the king (2 Chron. 24:20-22). Tradition says that Isaiah, the prophet was killed by being sawn in two. Elijah cried to God concerning the numbers of nameless prophets who were killed by the sword in his day (1 Kings 19:10). King Jehoiakim, himself, killed Uriah, the prophet, with the sword when he prophesied the destruction of Israel.

The second half of verse 37 says, "...they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated". Many of God's people lived poor, destitute lives. The testimony of Elijah is that "He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins" (2 Kings 8). Elisha followed suit. Eventually, such came to be known as the clothing of the prophet (Zech. 13:4). It was no accident that John the Baptist came, dressed in "a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist" (Matt. 3:4). Such was the typical clothing of the man of God.

Finally, verse 38, ...

Hebrews 11:38

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

We see the picture here of God's people, by faith, living as exiles and refugees. David spent many of his days "wandering in deserts" hiding from king Saul in caves (1 Sam. 24, 26). He even spent his days running in the wilderness from Absalom (2 Sam. 15ff).

During the days of king Ahab, Obadiah "took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water" (1 Kings 18:4). Elijah fled into the desert (1 Kings 19:4).

Now, I hope that you catch a few things from this. Even David, who experienced some mighty victories in his faith, also faced some pretty devastating defeats. So, know that a life of faith doesn't always mean only a life of health, wealth and prosperity. It often knows the pains and defeats of life.

But, don't despair. Know that it's there in the pains and defeats that the sweetness of the LORD often comes. See, it's often the case that we don't see God in our victories as much as we see God in our defeats. C. S. Lewis once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." It was certainly true for David. When all went well for David, he lost sight of God and grabbed sight of a woman, which led to his downfall. But, when he was in the wilderness, David wrote some of the greatest songs of longing for God.

Psalms 63

O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,
In a dry and weary land where there is no water.
Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.
Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,
My lips will praise You.
So I will bless You as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands in Your name.
My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.
When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches,
For You have been my help,
And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to You;
Your right hand upholds me.
But those who seek my life to destroy it,

Will go into the depths of the earth.
They will be delivered over to the power of the sword;
They will be a prey for foxes.
But the king will rejoice in God;
Everyone who swears by Him will glory,
For the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped.

One of the songs we sang this morning is along the same theme:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Refrain:

It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And through the sorrows of life, there often comes a longing for something beyond this life, ...

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

Such is the true measure of faith -- when things around us crumble, but we find significance and hope in Jesus.

So, let's bring it to your life. Yes, there are those who have great faith and do great things with their faith; even those things that from the world's perspective looks "successful." They raise the money for big buildings! They have large churches with many resources. They see many people coming to Christ. They send missionaries out all over the world. Yes, there are these people. But, there is also another group of people that have the same faith, only their experiences are a bit different. Rather than conquering the world in Jesus' name, they are tortured and beaten and imprisoned and killed for their faith.

Both of these sorts of people are placed upon the pedestal here in Hebrews, chapter 11, as those who lived by faith. If God especially commends either of these groups, it is the group of those who experienced persecuted faith. He said of these, "Men of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb. 11:38). In other words, the world did not realize the treasures that these suffering people were. Instead, they cast them aside and sought to purge them from the world. But, God looks down with a sympathetic and caring eye upon these people.

So, what's the difference? What's the difference between those who experience victorious faith and those who experience persecuted faith. There is no difference in their faith. The faith of one is the faith of the other. The difference lies in the times and locations and the giftedness of those who lived.

For instance, think of Isaiah. When God called him to ministry, he called him to a ministry of barrenness. Perhaps you remember when he was called to ministry. After beholding the vision of the Lord, Isaiah was overwhelmed with his sin (Is. 6:5), but God cleansed him. When God said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah responded, "Here am I. Send me!" (Is. 6:8). Here was God's call for his life, ...

Isaiah 6:9-10
He said, "Go, and tell this people:
'Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.'
Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull, And their eyes dim,
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts,
And return and be healed."

That's not an encouraging call. It's a call to preach with no fruit. So naturally, Isaiah says, ...

Isaiah 6:11-13

Then I said, "Lord, how long?"
And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant,
Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate,
The LORD has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
Yet there will be a tenth portion in it,
And it will again be subject to burning,
Like a terebinth or an oak
Whose stump remains when it is felled
The holy seed is its stump."

In other words, "Isaiah, you preach until the city is devastated. But, be encouraged. There will be a small remnant who believe." That's a hard call. In some ways, such a ministry takes more faith than the successful ministries do, doesn't it? The easy call is to see God do wondrous things through you. But when God calls you to faithfully labor in a fruitless ministry, such a ministry takes great faith. And yet, before God, the one who conquered kingdoms by faith is just as pleasing to Him, as the faithful laborer, who sees but few converts.

I'm thinking of a missionary that I know in Ireland. He grew up in Ireland and came to the United States for school (I believe). It was here that he came to Christ. He then went to seminary and returned to Ireland as a missionary. This man is one of the most faithful evangelists that I know. He is constantly sharing his faith.

Now, if you know anything about Ireland, you know that it's a hard place. After a decade of labor in Ireland, my friend has a small church (a dozen people, perhaps). And yet, he is out faithfully, several times each week, knocking on doors and talking with people about Jesus. In many ways, it takes more faith to continue what he's doing than it does the "successful" missionary who converts hundreds and has a large and successful influence in the foreign land.

In what ways is my friend different than St. Patrick? He went to the same people. He was faithful in bringing the same message: Christ crucified. Much of the difference is between who God made them to be and where God has placed them to minister.

Much of your experience depends upon How God has made you and where God has placed you. So, the call of Hebrews 11 isn't a call to have faith to do these great things. Rather, the call of Hebrews 11 is a call to have faith and persevere in it, whatever comes your way.

Oh, may God give us victories in our faith! May we have the heart of Abel in our worship. May we have the boldness of Noah in our witness. May we have the willingness of Abraham in our lives. May we have the mentality of Moses regarding our possessions. May we have the discernment of Rahab regarding our hope. May we have the courage of Joshua regarding the strongholds in our lives. And yet, if God has apportioned another lot for us -- that of suffering -- by faith, may God grant us the strength to endure the tortures, the mockings, the scourgings, the chains, the imprisonment, the afflictions that await us as followers of Christ. May they not pull us from our way.

Now, one of the most encouraging things about this text has to be that Jesus, Himself, didn't experience the "victorious faith" as much as he experienced the "persecuted faith." Oh, Jesus had his times of victory. After feeding the 5,000 people, everyone wanted to make Him king (John 6). But this was short-lived, because Jesus knew their hearts. They weren't wanting Him to be king. They were looking for a free lunch.

When He rode into Jerusalem, Jesus experienced the victory! Crowds were praising Him! They were placing palm branches along the path. They were singing "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9). But within a week, those same people were crying out, "Crucify Him. Crucify Him!" (Matt. 27:22, 23). In leaving the earth, Jesus did not have a great following. Jesus was persecuted. He experienced the persecuted faith.

Do you want to follow our King? Then this path of persecution is probably the path we will follow.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 3, 2011 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Simon J. Kistemaker, p. 354

[2] 2 Macc. 6:30, RSV.