

July 7, 2019 - Hebrews 11: 30-40 - “Growing in faith through Persecution”

### Introduction:

The California State Assembly has passed a resolution telling pastors to affirm homosexuality. They aimed at telling religious leaders in California **what** they should preach from their pulpits. The measure now heads to the state senate for final approval. More than two dozen doctors, counselors, former homosexuals, and other Christian leaders signed a letter condemning the resolution, which they said violates religious freedom.

"We have a track record," said Gannam. "We have actual patients and clients who have benefitted from therapy to help them with their unwanted attractions. We've helped them change their lives. We've helped them to live heterosexual lifestyles with strong and healthy marriages and so it's really a slander against them to say that this practice is somehow unethical and harmful." Gannam noted, "It's a foreshadowing of worse things to come." It just shows the church is under- attack." We see the handwriting on the wall of persecution...

According to a report from Christians in Crisis a Christian is martyred every three minutes. In nearly 50 countries around the world it is illegal to profess Christ as Savior and or possess a Bible. Christian persecution is on the rise in America and we can expect it to get worse. It is unfortunate but we have become a hated majority, yet we are called to advance not retreat.

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is what some call the Bible's "Hall of Faith." Men like Abraham, Isaac Jacob, Moses, Enoch and Noah. But there are other men and women who dared to step up in the crowd and radically live out their faith in God. They lived on the edge and they made a difference. They were unashamed and they were "Sold Out" for the Lord. Jesus didn't call us to be "undercover Christians" who apologize for our faith; he called us to be "Sold Out and committed" for the cause of Christ. This may cause you to be persecuted for your faith.

The author of Hebrews skips the forty years of the Israelites' wilderness wanderings because of their lack of faith. This emphasizes the truth that without faith it is impossible for us to please God (11:6). That being the case, all of us should want to know how to make our faith grow. This requires being proactive in these **four** areas in which we can practice this. First...

### I Stay away from negative people (11:30).

1. Other than Joshua and Caleb, every Israelite man, twenty years of age and older, who left Egypt died in the wilderness because of his lack of faith. Only their children entered the Promised Land (Num. 14:26-31; 26:65). Then, under Joshua's leadership, as a result of their faith the walls of Jericho fell down at the beginning of the conquest of the promise Land.

To possess the land, they first had to conquer Jericho, a fortress city surrounded by a great wall, impregnable by the standards of Joshua's day. God has a strange plan for Joshua to take the city. He tells him to march his army around Jericho for seven days (Josh. 6:3-4a).

Remember God tell Joshua to forbid the Israelites to speak as they march around the walls of Jericho (Josh. 6:10). They walked about and there was “no talking”.

2. God knows it only takes a few negative or complaining people to discourage everyone. If God had allowed them to talk, I imagine that on about the third day an Israelite would say to another, "Don't you feel foolish just walking around these walls?" "Yes, I do!" Then, that person would say the same thing to another and that attitude would spread like wildfire.

3. If you want your faith to grow, stay away from negative, complaining people. Don't hang around people who always see the problems rather than the possibilities of faith. Negativism is extremely contagious; you can be easily infected and your faith weakened. Because the Israelites do as God commands, the walls of Jericho fall on the seventh day when the priests blow their trumpets and the army shouts. There are many "Jericho's" in our lives, you know “impenetrable walls”.

At those times, we must wait on the Lord, often much longer than seven days. As we wait, we must have faith in what promise in Isaiah 30:18 **And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD [is] a God of judgment: blessed [are] all they that wait for him.** To make your faith grow, stay away from negative people and...

## II. Stay focused on God's purpose (11:31).

1. Next in this passage we read: **By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace (11:31).** Before taking Jericho, Joshua sent spies into the city. Rahab hid them in her house. She had only heard stories of the God of Israel, probably from some of her traveling customers. However, even with so little knowledge-and all of it secondhand-she has incredible faith and believes God will give Jericho to the Israelites.

Rahab is a surprising entry in "Faith's Hall of Fame" because she was a Gentile and a prostitute. Yet, because of her faith, shown by welcoming the spies, God spares her and her family when Jericho is destroyed (Josh. 2:9, 11; 6:17b). Even more surprising is that Rahab a Canaanite prostitute, becomes the great, great grandmother of King David and a key person in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Mt 1:5-6). Salvation is offered to all!

You may think God can't use you to do any great thing, but God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. We know this because of the truth in Ephesians 2:10--- **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.** Your faith will grow if you stay away from negative people stay focused on God's purpose, and...

## III. Exchange your pride for God's power (11:32-38).

1. Because of the limits of time, the great roll call of the heroes of our faith continues as the author simply lists the names of people who through faith: **Subdued kingdoms**: Some of these were Joshua, David, King Asa, Jehoshaphat, King Hezekiah, and King Josiah.

**Wrought righteousness:** Some of these were Elijah, Elisha, and the other prophets in general; King Josiah also.

**Obtained promises:** Among these we could include Caleb, Gideon, and Barak.

**Stopped the mouths of lions:** These include Daniel, David, and Benaiah (one of David's mighty men).

**Quenched the violence of fire:** Among these are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

**Escaped the edge of the sword:** David escaped the sword of Goliath and the sword of Saul; Moses escaped the sword of Pharaoh; and Elijah escaped the sword of Jezebel.

**Out of weakness were made strong:** these are Sarah, Gideon, Abraham, Esther, and King Hezekiah.

**Waxed valiant in fight:** Some of the many in this description are David, King Asa, and Jehoshaphat.

**Women received their dead raised to life again:** The Old Testament mentions at least two who fit this description, the widow of Zarepheth and the Shunamite woman.

The key word in verse 36 is **others**. All those previously mentioned were victors who escaped danger and death. However, others did not have a miraculous deliverance like that of Noah, Moses, or Rahab.

2. Some endured mocking's, scourging's, bonds, and imprisonment. Others were stoned, sawn asunder, and slain with the sword. Some heroes of faith wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (11:36-37). These are listed so we will know it is not always God's will to deliver us our way; therefore, sometimes we must simply endure. A great example of this truth is found in Daniel 3:17-18.

Another example, the apostle Paul had what he calls a thorn in the flesh that was tormenting him. This great man of faith prayed three specific times for God to take it away (2 Cor. 12:7-8). There are at least three kinds of grace in the Bible: **empowering**, or sustaining, grace (Acts 4:33), **saving** grace (Eph. 2:8), and **equipping** grace (1 Pet. 4:10). When God allows us to have a problem He doesn't take away, He gives us sustaining grace to live with it. There is an old saying: "God will never put more on us than He gives us the grace to bear."

3. God's power is made perfect in our weakness. Sometimes God allows us to go through the fires of affliction to burn away our pride and self-confidence. We will never experience God's power until we get rid of our pride. James 4:6 expresses this truth---

Our faith will never grow until we face a problem we can't handle on our own. God wants our faith to grow continually; therefore, life is a series of problems we can't deal with by ourselves. Sometimes we will be like Paul and some who were not delivered. What does Hebrews 11:38a tell us of those with such faith, the world was not worthy. The world is not necessarily friendly to people of faith,... and the world isn't **worthy** of them either.

The world forced some of God's saints to live like animals in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves (11:38b). They were denied the world's comfort but received God's commendation. To make your faith grow, stay away from negative people, stay focused on God's purpose, Exchange your pride to God's power, and ...

#### IV. Stand on God's promises (11:39-40).

1. All the great heroes of faith, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise (11:39). Some received some of the promises such as the Promised Land-but none of the Old Testament heroes received the ultimate Promise, the Messiah, a Savior. Everyone in the Old Testament died at least four hundred years before Christ was born.

2. But OT saints went to heaven by demonstrating the same saving faith as NT believers. How is that possible? Verse 40 tells us: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. People in the OT were saved by the same faith as you and I. They were saved by faith, **looking forward** to what Christ would do on the cross. We are saved by faith, **looking back** at what He did. The OT saints had only a shadow of the coming sacrifice, but they were faithful to what they had.

#### Conclusion:

One critical point of this chapter is faith doesn't guarantee us a life free of problems and pain. James tells us to count it all joy when we face trials of various kinds (Jas. 1:2).

Having problems that don't go away teaches us to faithfully wait on the Lord to fulfill His promise. David writes: I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. <sup>2</sup>He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay (Psa. 40:1-2a-b).

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