

30—Hebrews 11:32-40—Those for Whom the World Was Not Worthy

I. Introduction

- A. There have been countless missionaries for whom the world was not worthy. Their faithfulness could not be measured in the balance of success and failure.
 - 1. One of those missionaries was Adoniram Judson who married his wife Ann in 1812, and then sailed to Burma to begin missionary work.
 - 2. It took six years to see the first convert.
 - 3. He moved his family inland and was soon arrested because all westerners were considered spies. He was in prison for 17 months.
 - 4. Shortly after that, his wife Ann died and six months later, their third child died. All three of their children didn't make it. He was married two more times, and 7 out of his 13 children did not make it.
 - 5. At one point, he stopped translating the OT into the Burmese language and moved away from the mission out into the jungle and built a hut and dug a grave next to it. He sat beside it contemplating his own death.
 - 6. He got word that his brother had died but that he had turned to Christ before his passing. This was the turning point for Adoniram.
 - 7. He finally finished the Bible translation and today there are 3,700 Baptist congregations in Myanmar who trace their origin to this man's labors.
- B. Sometimes the seed lay dormant in the soil for years before it sprouts. In fact, Judson really never got to see what became of the work. They only become obvious years after his death.
- C. How would you have measured his success while he was alive? Only faith in Christ commends us to God.

II. Main Point

- A. If you live by faith, success or failure in this life does not determine your outcome; faith in Christ does.
 - 1. Maybe this is an underlying main point—if you faithfully obey with no results you labors were not in vain. If you compromised the truth for results you failed and your labors were in vain.

III. Outline

- A. By faith many accomplished great things
- B. By faith many failed at great things
- C. By faith, we all are commended to God

IV. Exposition

- A. I want us to land on faith in Christ—not success or failure. And because of that, we need to take note of those things by which we often measure one's faith because both success and failure are possible while having faith in Christ. In this first section, I want to think about great things God accomplished through some by faith.
 - 1. The examples of faith throughout the history of the Bible have barely been discussed. That's why he says there in verse 32—and what more shall I say?
 - a) The fact is, there are many more examples that he could bring up but he's now going to summarize a few more for the sake of time.
 - b) The ones he chose to discuss may seem odd—Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets.
 - (1) The preacher begins in a very unlikely place—the book of Judges because the summary statement for that book is—the people did what was right in their own eyes.
 - (2) The cycle was the same every time. The people sinned against God, the Lord raised up an enemy to punish them, they cried out for help, and the Lord raised up a judge to save them from their enemies.
 - c) The first one he mentions is Gideon.
 - (1) Those to whom the book of Hebrews was written need to see this—by faith God uses even people like Gideon who were weak in faith to do some amazing things.

- (2) The story goes like this—God sends an angel to Gideon in Judges 6:11 because the Midianites had overpowered Israel and because of Midian, the people of Israel made for themselves dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.
- (a) In other words, they had to hide in mountains because every time they tried to plant their crops, the Midianites would come out against them.
- i) Mind you, this was happening because the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord had given them into their enemies' hands.
 - ii) They finally cried out to the Lord for help when they had nowhere else to turn.
 - iii) Their only hope now was the Lord. It had always been so but they had forgotten.
- (3) Do you recall Gideon's response to the angel when he came to him and said—Judges 6:12 "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."
- (a) Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."
- i) I think we all feel this way. Things are falling apart around us and we struggle to see what's going on. We struggle to connect the obvious dots.
 - ii) Gideon continues those doubts by asking for signs when he puts out the fleece.
 - iii) In the Lord's kindness, he indulges him and convinces him to take action.
 - iv) The first thing he must take action against is the sin in the camp beginning with his dad and then he can go into battle with the Midianites.
 - v) Once he has dealt with the sin of Baal, he now must go fight.
 - vi) An army of 32,000 come to help him. The Lord said—that's too many people.
 - (1) God told him to say this—Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home.
 - (a) Guess how many left? 22,000!
 - (b) 10,000 remained but God said there are still too many people.
 - (2) God gives the remaining men a test.
 - (a) He says take them down to the water and those who lapped the water like a dog, set them aside and I will save Israel with them.
 - (b) They ended up with a ragtag group of 300 men who drank water like a dog.
 - (c) God sends them to fight this massive army with trumpets and empty jars.
 - (d) And much like Jericho, they are told to blow the trumpets and shout.
 - (e) And guess what happens? Look down there at verse 33 in Hebrews—they conquered kingdoms and the end of verse 34—they put foreign armies to flight.
 - (f) The writers of Hebrews has the story pegged right.
 - vii) A man who doubts the Lord and seems weak in faith accomplishes the impossible by faith. It is faith that commends us to God.
- d) The second one he mentions is Barak.
- (1) The same pattern is true for him. In Judges 4 Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord sold them into the hands of the Canaanites.
- (a) For 20 years they oppressed the people of Israel and then they cried out to the Lord.
- i) The Lord raised up Deborah a prophetess who judged Israel.
 - ii) She called for Barak to obey God's instructions to take his army and fight against the enemy.
 - iii) As the story goes, Barak would not go unless Deborah went with him.
 - iv) She agreed to go but said that the glory will go to a woman instead.
 - v) They go into battle and the Lord routed their enemies.
- (2) Through faith, Barak did as he was instructed and they were delivered from their enemies. Israel's own sin had led to this but God used a man who did not seek his own glory to deliver the people.
- e) The third example is Samson.

- (1) The scene is the same. Judges 13 tells us that the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.
 - (a) The story of the one who would deliver them before they even cried out for help was raised him up by the Lord from his birth for this task.
- (2) What seems to stand out with the story of Samson was his unnatural strength and his odd ways of accomplishing the defeat of Israel's enemies.
 - (a) There are hardly any lessons that I'd like to teach my son from the life of Samson.
 - (b) Yet, what does stand out is his zeal to deliver his people from the enemy.
 - (c) His last act when he took down the Philistines and their false god, Dagon, was a clear sign that God was with Samson. His hair started to grow back and he called upon the Lord to remember him and strengthen him one last time.
 - (d) And the Lord did! Samson trusted in what he could not see. His eyes had been gouged out but by faith he saw the Lord and he conquered kingdoms.
- f) The next example is Jephthah who seems to be an unlikely choice, too.
 - (1) The story of Israel was the same. They did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. It says they forsook the Lord and did not serve him. So, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. And they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel for 18 years.
 - (a) The cycle of Judges is an important detail to this chapter on faith because those who this was originally written to, are on the verge of walking away from the Lord.
 - (b) Jephthah was an unlikely choice even when Israel needed someone to deliver them.
 - i) He was the son of a prostitute. When he grew up, his tribe drove him out of the land and swore to never give him an inheritance among the people of God.
 - ii) But after some time, the Ammonites made war with Israel so the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah back to fight for them.
 - iii) He asked the obvious questions—"Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"
 - iv) He finally agreed to come fight for them and he prevails mightily.
 - v) By faith, Jephthah the son of a prostitute conquered kingdoms.
- g) There are obviously more examples. David and Samuel and the prophets.
 - (1) The successes of these are probably pretty easy to see throughout the Bible.
 - (2) We know of David and Goliath and later how David conquered many nations and brought about peace and justice as our text says.
 - (a) "Facing the Giants"
 - (3) Samuel was the last of the judges and prophet who anointed Saul as King as well as David.
 - (a) In 1 Samuel, he says in chapter 12 as he recounts—1 Samuel 12:9-11 But [Israel] forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them. And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.' And the LORD sent Jerubbaal (Gideon) and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety.
 - i) God used imperfect men to deliver his people from their enemies by faith.
 - ii) By faith, they successfully defeated enemies, restored righteousness, obtained promises, and put enemies to flight.
 - iii) The common ingredient was faith in the Lord.
 - iv) God made weak men strong by faith to accomplish extraordinary things.
 - (4) These men who delivered God's people out of the hands of their enemies did so by faith.
 - (a) It was the result of the people returning to the Lord.

- (b) For years they lived in fear. Their crops were destroyed. Nothing went right. They continued to decline. And they continued to ignore their sin so God continued to oppress them until they finally decided to return to him.
 - (c) They finally decided they had had enough. It was their repentance that led to deliverance.
 - (d) They decided to no longer do what was right in their own eyes and gladly obey the Lord.
- B. This leads us to the second point. We've seen the successes of those who by faith delivered the people but that cycle finally caught up to them. At some point, it became too late. The prophets are largely unsuccessful even though they had faith. The people refused to repent and those whom God sent did not succeed but their labors were not in vain.
1. If you were to measure the ministry of Isaiah by how many people he convinced to turn back to the Lord then he was an utter failure.
 2. Daniel can be named among this group but he's in exile because the people did not repent.
 - a) Yes, by faith he shut the mouths of lions.
 - b) His three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego quenched the power of fire in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.
 - (1) Imagine that conversation when these guys went home to their wives—how did work go today? I was thrown into the furnace.
 3. Elijah was threatened by Jezebel and he went and hid in a cave after calling fire down from heaven on Mt. Carmel.
 4. Jeremiah was thrown into a well and also put in stocks.
 5. Elijah and Elisha both wandered about in deserts.
 6. The prophet Zachariah was put to death in the sanctuary.
 7. That famous passage of Isaiah 6 where he sees the glory of God high and lifted up and the Lord asks who will go for me?
 - a) Every missionary has likely quoted his response—"Here I am! Send me."
 - b) Then God tells him this—Isaiah 6:9-11 "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"
 - (1) The fact is, they never listened. God essentially told Isaiah you will not succeed but trust and obey me nonetheless.
 - (2) That is a difficult prospect of ministry—go preach to them and they are never going to listen.
 8. By faith, Elijah and Elisha raised two boys from the dead as it says there in verse 35.
 9. There in verse 36, some were tortured for their faith but were not raised from the dead.
 - a) The reason is given—they would not receive release so that they might receive a better resurrection.
 - (1) In other words, to be raised in this life still meant that they were to die again.
 - (2) They were hoping in that better resurrection. The eternal one. The one with the resurrection body that will never die again. The one that brings them to God.
 - b) What does a man believe when he refuses release instead of denying Christ?
 - (1) What does he see beyond the terrorists?
 - (2) I just heard the story of one of our IMB missionaries, the Graham family from Nashville, who was living in Kuwait when Saddam Hussein invaded and took them hostage.
 - (a) There he is in the U.S. Embassy with his family hoping to be released to go back to the states.
 - (b) At some point, the Iraqis allow the women and children to fly home while the husband is kept as a hostage.
 - i) Can you imagine handing your wife and kids over to the Iraqis in hope that they will take them to the airport?

- (c) Many people were praying for his release and some time later Saddam Hussein had these troubling dreams and he demanded that all the hostages be released. The missionary flew home and was reunited with his family.
 - (d) This missionary saw his sovereign Lord ruling and reigning over the earth and he struck fear in Saddam's mind through these dreams and he let them go.
10. Some received sufferings there in verse 36. Mocking and floggings, and even imprisonment.
11. Others were stoned and some sawn in two.
- a) The story of Isaiah's death matches this description.
 - b) These prophets walked around as outcasts among their people.
 - (1) They often lived outside of the land.
 - (2) They had to wear clothing of sheep skin and goat skin.
 - (3) These people called on God to proclaim his words to them were often destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. They were just the messengers of God.
 - (4) Can you imagine being one of these prophets who merely said what God told them to say and they had to wander about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves and holes in the ground?
 - (5) I'm sure we would have thought that their ministry was a failure.
 - (6) But it would have been a failure only if they had not had faith and did not obey the Lord.
 - (7) By our standards of success, we would not have accepted their résumé for any position in the church.
 - (a) But the writer of Hebrews says something very strange about them—they were those of whom the world was not worthy.
 - i) What do you see as worthy today? I don't think we are often satisfied with our kids simply trusting the Lord and gladly obeying him.
 - ii) We have travel baseball. Practices every night of the week. If they make it in business or have a successful career that's all that matters. That was what all those nights in gym or the library were for.
- C. Yet our last point is simply this—by faith all are commended to the Lord.
1. Success or failure does not determine your end. Faith in Christ does.
 2. I think many seek success instead of faith and obedience.
 - a) Many missionaries are required to produce results to keep their funding.
 - b) If they compromise the truth of the gospel to get more numbers, then they keep their funding.
 - (1) But if they compromise the truth, their work was in vain.
 3. The people of God responded to Jeremiah's message like this: Jeremiah 44:15-18 ¹⁵ Then all the men who knew that their wives had made offerings to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, all the people who lived in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah: ¹⁶ "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you. ¹⁷ But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. ¹⁸ But since we left off making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."
 - a) They had success if they offered sacrifices to idols.
 - b) But when they had stopped, they had failures.
 - c) Do you base your beliefs on the outcomes?
 - d) Would you compromise the truth for success?
 - e) I'm not willing to do that. I hope you are not willing either.
 4. The climax is next week's text but I cannot leave without mentioning this:
 - a) Jesus's ministry appeared to be a failure. It ended in death and by our estimation, only about 120 followers waiting for the Holy Spirit to come.
 - b) Yet, what appears to be failure was actually victory. He trusted and obeyed the Father to the very end.

- c) The cross wasn't a failure. It was salvation for all who believe.
- d) In the face of danger and the temptation to compromise the truth, hold fast to the truth to the end and you will not fail.
- e) It is not your successes and failures that commend you to God. It is faith in Christ.