

Chapter Seventeen

WHAT MORE SHALL I SAY?

Hebrews 11:32-40 *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through FAITH conquered kingdoms, wrought righteousness, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The nine verses that end the chapter clearly bear out my premise. By faith, many did great deeds and saw great miracles; by faith, others were put through great pain and anguish. Surely, not because they believed, but because it was God's good intention that even through suffering He would be glorified in His people. They were willing because they had that **inner witness of reality**, that would not let them escape the sorrow and pain. They could have done so, if they had denied their Lord as their persecutors demanded.

The sacred writer has made his point in the previous examples of this chapter. Now he just groups a lot of names together, not even in chronological order, but that will not bother his readers for they are well aware of the histories of each new name recorded. We might lose the impact of these names and deeds as they are fired at us so quickly, but to the Jews, each phrase would bring a vivid memory. Josephus, the early historian, used the same Greek phrase as our author when telling how David *conquered kingdoms*. The Septuagint, the Greek version of our Old Testament, uses the same words to tell how David *wrought righteousness*; how faith *stopped the mouths of lions* for Daniel; how faith *quenched raging fires* for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The reference to *escaping the edge of the sword* would turn the readers' thoughts to the deliverance of Elisha and Elisha from Jezebel and the Syrians. Further examples are taken from the lives of the faithful not recorded in our Old Testament, but probably well known to readers of the apocryphal books, especially the second book of Maccabees. Certainly the phrases *being mighty in war* and *putting alien armies to flight* would immediately cause them to think of the unforgettable glories of Maccabean days.

However, the stories of faith are not always victorious when seen through mortal eyes. If the chapter stopped at verse 34 we would be tempted to believe that only *good things* happen to those who have *faith* in God - *health, wealth and prosperity*. But death, persecution and suffering - can this be by faith? Yes! Yes! Yes! - if God will be glorified in it. And He has been glorified through the suffering of His people. As I read the Gospel of John I find many times that Jesus speaks about His coming glory. What do you think of when you read that word, *glory*? I have tried to define *glory* and finally concluded it to be something like this: "*all the fullness of God, revealed.*" Jesus said in John 17:1 "*Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify You.*" - and He went to the cross. Indeed, every reference to *glory* in John's gospel is associated with the death of Jesus! Glory comes through suffering!

Maccabean history was full of records of the suffering and martyrdom of faithful Jewish people during the evil days of the Syrian, Antiochus Epiphanes, stories which Hebrew readers could well relate to the phrases above. Church history, since the times of the apostles and the writer of Hebrews, has many similar accounts.

We could write, *By FAITH Stephen was put to death, crying, 'Father, do not lay this sin to his*

charge! By this act of faith, he released Saul of Tarsus from the condemnation of God, thereby opening the way for God to call Saul into his great ministry as Paul the Apostle. If Stephen had reacted to his anguish by calling God's wrath down on Saul (as I confess I would have been tempted to do!), I wonder if Saul would ever have become the great apostle.

By *FAITH* Paul was imprisoned in Rome so that he would have the time to write the great epistles which have become such a source of encouragement and guidance for countless believers.

By *FAITH* the early believers were persecuted so that the gospel would spread throughout the Roman world as they fled their persecutors.

By *FAITH*, Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer were burned at the stake in the middle of the sixteenth century, so that a "light might be lit in England that would never be put out."

By *FAITH* the missionaries were ordered out of China in the middle of the twentieth century so that a pure church of believers might grow within the Chinese culture - not an imitation of the western church. That's a hard one for many of us who have the contorted view that only the western concept of church is acceptable to God. In my travels I have almost come to the cynical position that our 'western' church is the least acceptable to God! Some will not accept that the church in China has grown to multiplied millions since the missionaries left. Let me add here, lest I am misunderstood, that I strongly believe in missions and missionaries. Sometimes, however, our methods and lack of unity I find hard to accept. Thank the Lord, this is becoming less evident in recent missions history.

By *FAITH* five young American men died in the jungles of Ecuador on January 8th 1956 so that the Auca Indians might also become inheritors with us of the riches of the Gospel. The world's editorials called this a great waste of young American lives, but as one of them, Jim Elliott, had written in his diary just hours before his death, "**He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose!**" That should become the motto of all who would 'walk by Faith'.

The names of Pete Fleming, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully, Nate Saint and Jim Elliott, together with their wives', are well known in Heaven and in Hell, for through the death and anguish they suffered, a wide breach was made in the prison walls that had kept the Auca Indians in the captivity of sin. Today, we can rejoice that many thousands of those precious people have walked through into the freedom found only in Christ. Should my reader not know of this event, I encourage you to read "Through Gates of Splendour" by Elizabeth Elliott, Jim's widow.

Truly we can concur with the statement that *the death of martyrs has been the life-blood of the church*. Today, in the twentieth century, there is possibly more martyrdom and more persecution than at any time in history, but the church is not defeated and continues to grow at an exponential rate.

*Some through the waters, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow but God gives a song,
in the night season and all the day long.*
(G.A.Young)

Might we not also write that by *FAITH*, _____ (put in your own name) went into the latest valley of pain because the Father wants to make him/her more like His other child, JESUS ?

verses 39, 40

All these men and women of faith are recorded as an example to us. They did not receive any reward in this life for their faithfulness. They had faith in God. They trusted Him and obeyed the word He spoke to them and within them. However, they had not received the 'something better' that is ours today. The reward for their faithfulness is found in the Saviour, Christ, who will give to every man as he deserves - not for his greatness in the eyes of the world or the church, but **for his faith**. Further, we have been given the indwelling Holy Spirit, the *promise of the Father* (Acts 1:4) - "Christ in us, the hope of glory", who will lead us into truth. It is His inner witness that enables us to walk in faith as we yield to His inner revelation. It is He who has brought us into saving faith, and He will produce the fruit of faith in us as we stand by the streams of living water. As we drink deeply of the rivers of living water, we shall produce fruit in due season.

"Oh Lord, I long to walk in your will. As the deer pants for the waters so my heart longs after you. Lead me in your will. I do not ask to know your will nor to be happy in it. Should you lead me through deep valleys I am willing to go, for you shall be my comforter even in the valley of death. I know how foolish and stubborn I can be so whenever I step out of your will, I give you full permission to whip me back into line. All I ask is that at the end of this journey, I will hear you say, 'well done! good and faithful servant.'"

The picture I have of faith is that I am but a child holding on to my heavenly Father's hand.

I do not know if today He will take me to places of pleasure such as the 'sweetshop' of life, or instead to the pain of the 'dentist'. I do know that He will find it necessary to take me to the latter if I go often to the former!

I do not know if tomorrow He will lead me into a deep valley but I do know that, in my past, such valleys have always been there before He takes me to mountain tops with Himself.

I do not know what His will is for me (other than what Scripture reveals for all of us) but I do know that He knows the path ahead.

I do not know what tomorrow holds but I do know who holds tomorrow! - and He is holding my hand!

I want my life to be all filled with praise to Thee,
My precious Lord divine Who died for me.
Let all my will be Thine, controlled by love divine,
Live out in me Thy life, O mighty Saviour.

Chorus:

Thy precious will divine, with joy I make it mine,
My heart shall be Thy throne, and Thine alone.
Choose thou the path I tread, and whither I am led,
Help me to follow on, O mighty Saviour.

A pilgrim born anew, a stranger going through,
Not of this world am I since I am Thine.
Weaned from its passing show, transformed Thy love to know,
Hold thou my hand in Thine, O mighty Saviour.

When evil foes assail and almost would prevail,
In that dark hour be Thou my strength and shield.
Lend then Thy strong embrace, uphold me by Thy grace,
In weakness be my strength, O mighty Saviour.

Yea, choose the path for me, although I may not see,
The reason Thou dost will to lead me so.
I know the toilsome way will lead to realms of day,
Where I shall dwell with Thee, O mighty Saviour.

(H.Tee) – permission sought.