

FAITH IN ACTION: PT. V

Hebrews 11:32-40

Hebrews is a wonderful letter to the early church reminding the first century Christians of the superiority of Christ over all things. He is both Lord and Christ, over which every square inch of all things He calls “mine!”. This was meant to be a comfort to the church, as they struggled against both a popular and political oppression and suppression of the Church. It was a comfort to be reminded that Christ is over all things, and is working all things according to His will, and that He will never abandon His Church, but will give them ultimate victory over their enemies, just as He had ultimate victory over sin and death and inaugurated the New Creation.

The Writer reminds us that Jesus is the fulfillment of all things promised in the OT, and the true reality of the types and kinds that we see pre-figured and foreshadowed in the OT. This is another reminder to the Church that they are holding fast to the truth, and encouraging them not to slip back into old patterns and habits of false worship.

Before our Advent season we moved in to chapter 11, which is a seminal section on what faith in action looks like. Remember, the Writer had just finished exhorting the Church not to be like those who shrink back from society and culture, but to press forward into it, bringing with them the Gospel, and the ultimate answer for all things. This is described as “faith” by the Writer, and he goes on to list many different people in the OT who demonstrated this kind of faith to the world.

We are going to be taking the next two weeks to finish up that list of people, some of whom are familiar to us, many might not be as familiar. However, each one is commended by their faith, meaning, each one was a living witness to the power and truth of the One True God, realized in Christ Jesus. Each person’s life has a story which is meant to help us understand more of who Jesus is and to encourage us to live out our faith in a similar way.

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, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, 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, mistreated —

of whom the world was not worthy — wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

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

Barak: Trusting God's Word

Judges 4-5

“And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.”

– Judges 4:1-2

“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand’?” Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.” – Judges 4:4-9

Barak and Deborah lead a successful campaign to drive out the enemies of Israel. The end of Sisera came from a woman when he hid in her tent; he was fed and watered, then he fell asleep; when he fell asleep Jael took a tent peg and drove it through the man's temple straight into the ground! Thus the enemy of Israel was given into the hand of a woman.

Two women played the key roles of leadership and courage: Deborah and Jael.

Why is Barak mentioned but not Deborah or Jael in the book of Hebrews?

The story reads as a cohesive whole. Barak trusted Deborah's leadership, and was the one who drove the enemy general to the tent where he would die. So, while Barak, as the man representing the army, is highlighted here, it was certainly not without the leadership and courage of the women in his life!

Barak and Deborah end up singing a song in Judges 5 that is their song together recounting the deeds of the LORD through Barak, Deborah, and Jael.

Some Bible scholars have posited that the reason that Deborah was sitting as judge instead of a man, was because there were no qualified men to sit as judge over Israel at that time – sort of second string leadership, second best – I tend to disagree with that assessment for several reasons.

There is no mention anywhere that Israel had no qualified men to sit as judge over Israel.

There is no real qualification for being a judge in the first place. God simply chooses a person for His own purposes, and uses them despite their inadequacies and mistakes, to deliver His people from their enemies, and to renew right worship of Himself among the people.

A judge is different than a Priest or Prophet or King. It should not come as a surprise that God can and does use women in all kinds of roles to lead and strengthen His people, after all, we are created in the image of God, equal in dignity and value before God. We were created, male and female, to complement one another. We are not the same, nor do we have the same abilities to do the same things, but are created in unique ways which are intended for the flourishing of the human race!

The beauty of the relationship of trust that Deborah and Barak example was born out of the faith that Barak demonstrated in the person God chose to lead the nation at that time, regardless of her sex.

Faith can see the bigger picture of what God is doing and submits to it, and participates in it, regardless of the role that God gives. Barak does not seek glory, but only to obey the Word of God.

Gideon: From Fear to Faith

Gideon (Judges 6-8)

“The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.” – Judges 6:1

Gideon was a man whom God chose to deliver the Israelites from the hand of the Midianites.

The state of Israel at the time: they were worshipping the false gods of Midian and the Ammorites; Baal and the Asherah poles. Both of these were phallic in nature, gods of fertility and sex; abominations that the LORD condemned everywhere they were in existence. Twisting and corrupting of God’s good natural orders of creation, into things hideous and twisted.

First order of business: To cut down the poles of Asherah and Baal and construct an altar to the LORD which was the same style that Abraham and Moses built, and offer

up the right sacrifices of atonement on them, confessing the sins of the people and calling the people to repent.

What are modern Baal and Asherah poles in our popular society and culture? (This is where I might offend some people as I get specific about the sins of our society, but before healing can happen, pain sometimes must come first).

The sex industry in media and the sex trafficking trade, including pornography.

The glorification of sex and body image in popular consciousness.

The normalization and even glorification of transgenderism and gay communities.

Separating the act of sex from its proper and good context: one man and one woman in marriage covenant.

Second order of business: To raise up an army to defeat the Midianites and set free the Israelites. 300 fighting men, with a plan God came up with which would use fear and deception to drive out the Midianites rather than brute force and military might. Highlighting the power of God to save His people no matter what or who comes against them, and no matter how small the army of the LORD is!

Third order of business: To drive out the rest of the enemies of Israel, and to bring all the tribes of Israel back into unity under the LORD.

“So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon.” – Judges 8:28

Gideon’s fear: Three times he asks the LORD for a sign to him guaranteeing that he would be safe and would succeed. THREE TIMES! The first time he asks for a sign that the messenger was truly from the LORD; the second time he asks for a sign that he would succeed in the coming battle against the Midianites; the third time the LORD preemptively gives Gideon a sign in the form of his manservant Purah, and a dream from the enemies which confirmed for Gideon that he would succeed.

“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.” – Judges 6:12

“And the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” – Judges 6:14-15

“That same night the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.” – Judges 7:9-11

What can we learn about faith from Gideon?

Faith is grounded in God's declaration about us, and not in what/how I define myself to be. God casts vision for Gideon about who he was, and who he would become. Faith holds that declaration before our eyes, and let's that declaration of our status before God determine and define for me who I truly am.

Faith at times seeks confirmation.

God condescends to give us confirmation when our faith is weak.

The greatest confirmation that we have or need that God will be our God, and that He will always be with us, protect us, and take care of us, is found in the cross of Jesus Christ! We do not need to put our Gideon fleece's to find strength in believing what God has said, we simply look to the cross to find the strongest and surest confirmation of God's covenant commitment to us!

Faith can accomplish great things for the LORD, and often surprise us with how God allows us to participate in such a great work!

Gideon had no idea that God would use him the way He did. He did not seek to aspire to greatness, or deliverance of God's people. He was hiding in a winepress from the enemy when God came to him, and called him to the work of God.

Conclusion

We have taken a look at the first two people of this final list in the Hall of Faith that the Writer gives us. Each of these men were commended for their faith, meaning, each of them were living witnesses to the power and superiority of God over all. We can learn some lessons about faith in action from each of these men:

Faith means that I hold to the truth of God in His Word against the popular tides of the culture when they are in opposition to Christ.

Faith means that I must be grounded in God's declaration about me and all things, and not the other way around.

Faith means that God gives opportunities for redemption and restoration.

Faith means that our whole lives, every square inch of it, is to be lived under Christ's rule and for His glory in the world.

Faith means that I do not seek glory for myself, but for Christ alone, content to play the roles that God brings into my life, knowing that they are for my good, and designed for His ultimate glory.

Let's pray.