

So Great a Cloud of Witnesses

Hebrews 10:39-12:3



1. This is such a famous text.
2. Sometimes it's called THE HALL OF FAME OF FAITH.
3. It's full of folks whose lives and exploits are well known to most of us.
4. But sometimes the most famous texts are the most misunderstood.
5. We read them so much on their own that we forget that they are actually part of a much larger context.
6. And that's the way it is with Hebrews 11.
7. This is no simple stroll down memory lane.
8. This is the climax of the Preacher's case.
9. In preaching terms, it's time to make APPLICATION, and to call for a VERDICT.
10. He's been WARNING his hearers to NOT GO BACK on their commitment to Jesus as they face increasing pressure from their society.
11. He's been ENCOURAGING them to HEAR and OBEY God's WORD . . . to TRUST in God's PROMISES . . . and to find their REFUGE, and their ANCHOR, and their MEDIATOR in God's SON, Jesus.
12. In the passage we heard last week, he urged them to let go of their lethargy, and to learn to imitate, ***"those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (6:12).***

13. In *that* text, the Preacher used ABRAHAM as the perfect illustration of what that looks like.
14. Now listen, Abraham is the “father of the faithful,” but Abraham is NO OUTLIER.
15. Abraham is not alone in his demonstration of faith and patience.
16. This disposition . . . this determination . . . to faithfully endure in the face of enormous suffering . . . is literally *the way of life* for every person who has ever responded to the call of God.
17. WITHOUT this kind of FAITH it is impossible to please God, the Preacher says.
18. But WITH this kind of FAITH one can HEAR whatever God says . . . FOLLOW wherever God leads . . . and DO whatever God asks, regardless of whatever storms, obstacles, or enemies stand opposed.
19. Just survey the list with me for a moment,
 - a. By faith ABEL . . . worshiped God the way God wanted to be worshipped, and his brother was jealous of him, and he murdered him.
 - b. By faith ENOCH . . . walked as close to God as he could, when everyone else in his world was running away from God as fast as they could.
 - c. By faith NOAH . . . built a boat at God’s command even though he was mocked and ridiculed mercilessly for it.
 - d. By faith MOSES . . . rejected the power and privilege that was due a prince of Egypt, in order to identify with and defend the poor and oppressed people of God.
 - e. And by faith RAHAB . . . renounced her citizenship in her own country to follow the true God’s people into a better country.
20. Can’t you just hear the cadence and the volume increasing with every illustration?
21. This is what faith can do . . .
 - a. Conquer kingdoms.
 - b. Administer justice.
 - c. Muzzle lions.
 - d. Extinguish fires.
 - e. Raise the dead.
22. And all of this IN SPITE OF not IN ABSENCE OF incredible suffering . . .
 - a. Mocking and flogging.
 - b. Chaining and imprisoning.
 - c. Stoning and sawing and stabbing with the sword.
 - d. Hunted . . . Impoverished . . . Afflicted . . . Mistreated . . . Homeless . . . and Hiding.
 - e. God’s people, “. . . *of whom the world was not worthy.*”

23. What a line . . . ***“of whom the world was not worthy”!***
24. To world they looked and sounded like lunatics and losers.
25. To the world these people were out of touch . . .and out of step . . . and out of line with history.
26. But what does the world know . . . what has it ever known?
27. These people were in step with their Lord . . . they were just following the trail blazed by their Lord.
28. See, here’s where the chapter and verse divisions in our Bible can be confusing, because the Preacher’s point doesn’t end at chapter 11.
29. No, he’s got one more example of this kind of faithful perseverance . . . the *ultimate* example of one who through faith and patience inherited the promises . . . the Lord Jesus himself.
30. The one he calls the ***“author and perfecter of our faith.”***
- 31. Listen, faith and patience in the face of intense pressure and inevitable persecution has always been the way of God’s people.**
- 32. It was the way of Jesus, himself . . . it was the way for these Hebrew sisters and brothers . . . and it is our way.**
33. But people of faith DON’T GIVE UP . . . they DON’T GIVE IN . . . and they DON’T GO BACK.
- 34. “[W]e are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”**
35. People of faith don’t shrink back . . . but I’ll tell you what people of faith do .

36. People of faith DO.

- a. They don’t hide in the corner and hope no one notices them.
- b. And they certainly don’t compromise their convictions in hopes of avoiding the fire.
- c. People of faith . . . WORSHIP . . . WALK . . . BUILD . . . LEAVE . . . MULTIPLY . . . SACRIFICE . . . BLESS . . . PLAN . . . RENOUNCE . . . STEP OUT . . . WELCOME . . . CONQUER . . . ADMINISTER . . . SHUT UP . . . QUENCH . . . ESCAPE . . . and FIGHT.
- d. Now all of that is empowered, but it is not easy, so . . .

37. People of faith must ENDURE.

- a. I’m struck by the number of times the Preacher points out that these people DIED IN FAITH . . . did you notice that, too?
- b. In verse 13, about the patriarchs he says: ***“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”***
- c. And in verse 39, about the martyrs he says: ***“And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised . . .”***

- d. Listen, the accounts of history are not always balanced on this side of the ledger.
 - 1) On this side we are LAMPOONED and LABELED.
 - 2) We are TARGETED and THREATENED.
 - 3) And, ***“As it is written, ‘For [his] sake we are BEING KILLED all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom. 8:36).***
 - 4) But on the other side . . . ***“God is not ashamed to be called our God,”*** and he has prepared something so much better for us (16).
 - 5) I’m reminded in this text that even Jesus closed his eyes in death . . . in nothing more than faith . . . in the promise of God concerning his resurrection . . . and he was raised.
- e. The accounts of history are not always balanced on this side, but they are balanced, and . . .

1. People of faith are REWARDED.

- a. They are ACCEPTED by God . . . SPARED by God . . . SHELTERED by God . . . BLESSED by God . . . and PROVIDED FOR by God.
 - b. Their enemies DROWN . . . their walls FALL . . . their battles are WON . . . and even their dead are RAISED to life.
 - c. Just look at the Pioneer of our faith: ***“seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2).***
2. This morning, if you feel like you are on the brink of losing your faith . . . that you’re just hanging on to it by a thread . . .
 3. I beg you to remember that YOU. ARE. NOT. ALONE!
 4. We are surrounded by SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES.
 5. Finish the course that has been laid out for you.
 6. Don’t GIVE UP . . . Don’t GIVE IN . . . and don’t GO BACK.
 7. But prepare for the journey by shedding the sin, and guilt, and shame that is weighing you down and holding you back.
 8. And keep your eyes on Jesus, so that you will not WEAR OUT and FAINT along the way.