

1 What is more Precious?

- Part 2 - Keeping the Faith

2 Scripture

- See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.
- But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.
- We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.
- As it has been said:
 - "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." [See Exodus 17:1-7]

3 Scripture

- Who were they who heard and rebelled?
 - Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?
- And with whom was he angry for forty years?
 - Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?
- And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?
- So, we see that they could not enter because of their unbelief.

4 Sermon Review

- Last time, we went over how, as believers in Christ, our most important asset is our faith.
- Our faith is more precious than gold!
- The reason why we made this statement was because faith is so powerful.

- Like dynamite, we only need a little to see mountains move.
- As Jesus told his disciples (Matt 17:20 NIV),
 - "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move.
 - Nothing will be impossible for you."

5 Sermon Review

- But what happens when our faith is smaller than a mustard seed?
- It may be so small that only a microscope can pick it up.
- As we mentioned in my last sermon, we might have "microscope faith" when we go through trials, and instead of believing God's faithfulness, we act like the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness and
 - Complain,
 - Grumble, and
 - Blame God and others.

6 Faith Heroes - Hall of Fame

- If this is the case, we should look to the Heroes' of Faith (Outlined in Hebrews 11) as our source of encouragement and inspiration.
- Listed are Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and undisclosed others who, through faith ...
 - Conquered kingdoms,
 - Administered justice, and
 - Gained what was promised.

7 Heroes of Faith

- Who also,
 - Shut the mouths of lions,
 - Quenched the fury of the flames,
 - Escaped the edge of the sword,
 - Whose weakness was turned into strength, and
 - Became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.
- Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (in history), let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Heb 12:1 NIV)

8 Fight the Good Fight

- So then, let us do that very thing and throw off . . .
 - All attitudes of unbelief and self-pity, where we spend more time complaining and grumbling than anything else.
 - All bad habits that keep us from spending quality time
 - reading and studying God's Word,
 - encouraging ourselves in the promises of God, and
 - fellowshiping and praying with other believers.
 - All compromise and moral slothfulness that cause us to withhold our love for our neighbor—even our enemies and do things that corrupt our body, soul, or spirit.
 - Instead, let us draw close to God, for he will draw close to us!

9 Keeping the Faith

- The essential purpose of the Book of Hebrews was to exhort Christians to persevere in the face of persecution.
- At that time, certain Jewish believers were considering turning back to Judaism and to the Jewish system of law to escape being persecuted for believing Christ to be the Messiah.
- So, the writer of Hebrews is using the Heroes of Faith to inspire these Jewish Christians to resist the thought of shrinking back in their faith despite whatever persecution they were going through.
- What is important about these Heroes of Faith is that they weren't afraid of persecution because they weren't looking for a temporal blessing but for an eternal inheritance.

10 Heroes of Faith

- Again, what was the motivating factor that caused these "Heroes of Faith" to sacrifice everything?
 - They knew that, without faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that
 - he exists and that
 - he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6 NIV)
 - They also understood that God's ultimate promise or reward to those who served him and remained loyal to him was immortality.
- As the writer of Hebrews says, For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:15 NIV)

11 Heroes of Faith

- All these people were still living by faith when they died.
- They did not receive the things promised;

- they only saw them, and
- welcomed them from a distance.
- And they admitted that they were
 - aliens, and strangers
 - on earth.

12 Heroes of Faith

- People who say such things show they are looking for a country of their own.
- If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had an opportunity to return.
- Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one.
- Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

13 Heroes of Faith

- By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.
- He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.
- He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

14 Heroes of Faith

- By faith,
 - he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger;
 - he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

- By faith,
 - he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood so that ...
 - the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

15 Other Heroes of Faith

- Others were tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection.
- Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.
- They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword.
- They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated — the world was not worthy of them.
- They wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

16 Other Heroes of Faith

- These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.
- God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.
- Does anyone remember the very next verse?
- Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (in history), let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Heb 12:1 NIV)
- In other words, since the Heroes of Faith did not shrink back from serving God in hostile circumstances and situations, so shouldn't these early Christians and us today.

17 State of Christian Persecution

- In an interview on November 1st, 2023, Sam Brownback, former Ambassador-at-large for President Trump, said that the level of Christian persecution today is the highest in history.
- In 2021, the numbers show,
 - 360 Million Christians live in places with high persecution levels.
 - 5,898 Christians were killed for their faith.
 - 5,110 Churches or other buildings were attacked.
 - 4,765 Christians were detained without trial.

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19 Christian Persecutions

- There are many different types of Christian persecution, ranging from
 - violent attacks and imprisonment
 - to discrimination and social exclusion.
- Christians may also face discrimination in
 - employment, education, and
 - participation in politics.
- In some cases, governments may pass laws that
 - restrict or prohibit certain aspects of Christian worship or expression, or
 - may limit the ability of Christians to gather together for worship or other activities.

20 State of Christian Persecution

- According to Mary Eberstadt,
 - There is a new form of vigorous secularism that freely mocks and scorns Christianity and other forms of religious traditionalism.
 - It set new lows for civil criticism of people's most cherished beliefs.
 - In some precincts, the "faith of our fathers" is controversial, as never before.

21 State of Christian Persecution

- According to an article in Newsweek written by Shawn Carney, he writes,
 - The alarming escalation of animosity toward Christians in America can no longer be ignored.
 - The pro-abortion, anti-family radical Left has sought tirelessly to undermine the nuclear family, religion, and traditional values for years.
 - The recent shooting at a private Christian academy in Nashville by Audrey Hale, a transgender individual with a detailed manifesto and maps, is a chilling example of the escalating violence against faith.

22 State of Christian Persecution

- This premeditated attack targeted a Christian school with a biblical theology curriculum, representing the Christian values that the shooter sought to destroy.
- Following the tragic events in Nashville,
 - left-wing journalists, columnists, entertainers, and activists directed their wrath toward Christians and conservatives rather than
 - mourning the victims and condemning the violence.

23 State of Christian Persecution

- Earlier this year, Jane Fonda, who claims to advocate for human rights, promoted violence against those who hold beliefs different from hers.
- The radical Left's silence in response to Fonda's comments tells you all you need to know about the pro-abortion, anti-Christian Left's feelings towards those who oppose them.
- Then again, perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised, given its callousness about the senseless killing of millions of unborn children.
- NOTE: Since May 2020, there have been 300 attacks against U.S. Catholic churches and 100 attacks against crisis pregnancy centers. (According to a tracker from CatholicVote.com)

24 Genocidal Antisemitism

- On October 7th, 2023, an armed conflict broke out between Israel and Hamas-led Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip after the latter launched a multi-pronged invasion of southern Israel.
- Leading with a barrage of over 5,000 rockets against Israeli cities, some 3,000 Palestinian militants breached the Gaza-Israel barrier, murdering in cold blood numerous civilians in more than a dozen massacres, setting fire to their homes, and attacking Israeli military bases situated near the Gaza border.
- By the end of October, more than 1,500 Israelis, mostly civilians, were killed in the initial attacks by Hamas, which makes it the most significant attack against Jews since the Holocaust.
- At least 44 countries, mainly from the Western world, characterized the surprise incursion as a terrorist attack.

25 Antisemitism

- However, since then, massive protests against Israel have ensued, organized by the Far-Left, pro-Palestinian, and pro-Hamas sympathizers.
- Last Saturday, an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 people were protesting in Washington, D.C., demanding that President Biden make Israel stop their attacks on Hamas.
- They stormed the White House and climbed the security fence to throw objects at the Secret Service officers.

- There were similar protests in New York City, London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, and several other places in the world where there are sizable Muslim populations.
- Instead of condemning Hamas for their terrorism, they unleashed a form of antisemitism that has never been seen before in America.

26 Hamas

- It should be noted that Hamas does not want a “two-state solution” but instead wants to destroy Israel and establish an Islamic theocracy in Palestine.
- In other words, they want unrestrained jihad to make Sharia Law the law of the land.
- No doubt, this very easily could lead to what is called Genocidal Antisemitism, where all Jews, one way or the other, are removed once and for all from Palestine.
- Their slogan is “From the River to the Sea,” meaning they want the annihilation of Israel, if not the whole of the Jewish people.

27 Hamas and the Far Left

- What is the bottom-line reason for today’s “woke,” entitled, diversity-obsessed, leftwing love affair with murderous jihadists?
- Both camps – (demonically possessed jihadists and angry, deranged far-left radicals) – HATE the “people of the book,” that is, Christians and Jews.
- Both Islamic and Marxist “true believers” are possessed by a deep, intense, abiding, and all-consuming spiritual loathing of Almighty God and His sacred laws of life.
- “The enemy of your enemy is your friend,” goes the saying.
- Thus, radical terroristic Muslims and smug, entitled, narcissistic, perpetually enraged, and thoroughly brainwashed leftists, the kind that populate America’s elite university campuses, are of one mind about the current war on Israel and hatred for the Jews.

28 The Ultimate Hero of Faith?

- So then, since we should fix our eyes on these Heroes of Faith and imitate their faith, who else should we focus on?
- Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author, and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy (reward) set before him,
 - endured the cross,
 - scorning its shame and
 - sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

29 Hardship from Persecution

- [Furthermore]
 - Endure hardship (from persecution) as discipline; God is treating you as sons.
 - No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful.
 - Later on, however,
 - it produces a harvest of righteousness and
 - peace for those who have been trained by it.
 - Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.
 - "Make level paths for your feet,"
 - so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed.

30 Remember . . .

- In the Book of Acts, a persecution after the stoning of Stephen.
- The Bible says, On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. (Acts 8:1)
- This is probably what the writer of Hebrews was referring to when he said, Remember those earlier days after you had received the light when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.
- Hebrews 10:32-34
 - Sometimes, you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times, you stood side by side with those who were so treated.
 - You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you had better and lasting possessions.

31 Perseverance

- So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.
- You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.
- For in just a very little while,
 - "He who is coming will come and will not delay.
 - But my righteous one will live by faith.
 - And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."
- But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

32 Summary

- Our faith is more precious than gold because it can move mountains.

- All it has to be is the size of a mustard seed, and there is no telling what God can do through those who believe.
- However, we must work to keep our faith strong, and we do this when we fight the good fight of faith by maintaining a clean conscience before God.
- Nevertheless, we must persevere in our faith by keeping the faith without shrinking back.
- Hard times must come because God disciplines those he loves so we won't be judged with the world.
- So then, let us keep our eyes on the prize and, like Jesus, blamelessly and honorably endure the wrath of sinful men.