

**VICTORIOUS FAITH**  
**HEBREWS 11:32-40**

They have been called “The Most Crushing Losses in Sports History,” “The Hall of Flameout,” and “Snatching Defeat from the Hands of Victory.” They are sports events that are considered major failures, gaffs, and defeats. For years, ABC captured the sense of loss on Wide World of Sports with an image of a ski jumper falling haphazardly off the end of the jump ramp to the words, “the agony of defeat.”

Every sports fan has their own list of particularly hard defeats, but here are a few:

- They needed one more strike to win the World Series in 2011; instead, the Texas Rangers gave up a hit that drove in two runs in the ninth inning and then lost the sixth game of the World Series in extra innings and then lost the World Series the next day.
- On the last day of the 1996 Master’s golf tournament, Greg Norman led by six strokes — an insurmountable lead that was surmounted; he lost by five strokes.
- Similarly, in 1999, Jean Van de Velde only needed to shoot a double-bogey on the final hole of the 1999 British Open to win. He shot a triple bogey and lost by one stroke.
- And perhaps my personal favorite, way back in 1916, poor Cumberland College was outmatched by the Georgia Tech football team, suffering the greatest loss in football history, losing 222-0.

Sometimes it seems like similar things happen in the spiritual realm. We look to our spiritual heroes and while we see people who accomplished great things, we also see great flaws. And we see gracious people who suffer and godly people who “aren’t rewarded.” That certainly has seemed to be the case with many of the people of Hebrews 11 — and will be as we work through the final verses of this great chapter. What are we to understand and believe from these verses? Are they stories of victorious followers of God, or failed followers of God? And what should we think and believe as we meditate on these verses?

These verses are a reminder that God is doing more than just working in the lives of individual people. Abraham’s story was about God’s faithfulness to a nation, not just about Abraham’s faithfulness. And so it was with Abel, Noah, Moses, David, and all the others mentioned in this chapter. Their stories may have ended in apparent failure or apparent victory, but the real meaning of their stories was what they revealed about the faithfulness of God.

As we conclude this great chapter this morning, we are going to be reminded that —

**GOD USES FRAIL PEOPLE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE IS ALWAYS TRUSTWORTHY.**

Whether His people “win” or “lose” in given circumstances is not the goal or lesson of these stories; the goal is to reveal that God never fails and that God is always victorious. In these final verses, we see four demonstrations of God’s victory...

## 1. The Victorious PEOPLE of Faith (v. 32)

- Sometimes when someone says, “I could go on and on forever,” they’ve already told you everything. That’s not the case in v. 32. When the writer says, *And what more shall I say?* He means that he has so much to say that he cannot list all the OT people of faith who endured and persisted in difficult days.
- He might try to continue his stories of people, but *time will fail me...* (And then he lists six names!)
  - ✓ His point is simply that this chapter and these names are not the total list of faithful people. He is summarizing now and the summary is that there always have been and always will be people who are faithful to the Lord.
  - ✓ We could spend a sermon (or two or three) on each of the names listed, but that’s not the point of the writer. He is saying, “You know these stories; remember they also were faithful...”
  - ✓ **Gideon** — In Judges 6-9 his faithful obedience is demonstrated when God used him and 300 others to defeat 135,000 troops (8:10). God was victorious and can be trusted.
  - ✓ **Barak** — Along with the prophetess Deborah, in Judges 4-5 Barak defeated the kingdom of Hazor under King Jabin.
  - ✓ **Samson** — While his life was a mixture of obedience and foolishness and sin, the end of his life is marked by repentance and God’s favor on him while he was blind and imprisoned in killing 3000 Philistines by bringing down their temple on them during a pagan festival (Judg. 13-16).
  - ✓ **Jephthah** — He led the Israelites against the Ammonites (Judg. 11-12).
  - ✓ **David** — The greatest of the kings of Israel and the one with whom the promise of the Messianic King was made (2 Sam. 7:16); from his meeting of Goliath to his relationship with Saul and Jonathan and his leadership of the nation, he was uniquely set apart as a man after God’s heart (Acts 13:22).
  - ✓ **Samuel** — He obediently anointed first Saul and then David as kings of Israel, though he understood the nation was being rebellious against God (1 Sam. 8:6ff).
  - ✓ And add to these *the prophets* — Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel... It has been said that the writer recognized that in the OT there was “an embarrassment of riches as he contemplates the long list of heroes of faith...” [Robertson]
- What is the writer’s point in mentioning these names?
  - ✓ The Hebrew readers were suffering (10:32-33). They were contemplating going back to Judaism (and forsaking Christ) to alleviate their suffering — the antithesis to the faithfulness of this chapter.
  - ✓ In the stories of all these individuals, there seemed no chance of victory (e.g., Judg. 8:4, 10). And the point of the overwhelming trouble is that we must never be dependent on ourselves (Judg. 7:2).
  - ✓ All these names are more reminders that just because there is opposition doesn’t mean there is no victory. God doesn’t pay attention to odds makers; when God is on our side, we always win.

- ✓ The writer also uses these names to remind us that God uses flawed people — even people with significant flaws (and all of these had great weaknesses and spiritual failures).
- ✓ “In every saint there is always to be found something reprehensible. Nevertheless although faith may be imperfect and incomplete it does not cease to be approved by God.” [Calvin]
- ✓ God uses flawed people to accomplish his purposes and prove victorious (and that’s hopeful for us)!
- ✓ There is no circumstance that cannot be overwhelmed by God (we will see that momentarily); there are no people that cannot be used by God — both those realities should be a great encouragement when we live in difficult days (which all God’s people have always endured).

## 2. The Victorious ACCOMPLISHMENTS of Faith (vv. 33-35a)

- So God uses weak people to accomplish his purposes. But what did those people do?
  - ✓ **Conquered kingdoms** — They overcame military opposition (something that was true of all of the previously mentioned six names, except Samuel). Cf. also **2 Kings 19:35**.
  - ✓ **Performed acts of righteousness** — Probably not just a reference to personal righteousness, but that in their leadership and official duties, they practiced justice — did the right things. Though opposed in various ways, they did what honored the Lord and upheld His truth.
  - ✓ **Obtained promises** — They didn’t always receive all the things promised, but God fulfilled a variety of temporal promises to provide for them (cf. **Josh. 21:43-45**).
  - ✓ **Shut the mouths of lions** — Obviously a reference to Daniel 6, but perhaps also to David (1 Sam. 17:34-37), Benaiah (1 Chron. 11:22), or Samson (Judg. 14:5-6).
  - ✓ **Quenched the power of fire** — A reference to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Dan. 3:8ff), even though they were not listed above. “The faith of these men was considerable in that they were not assured that they would be miraculously delivered, and all they could do was to commit themselves to God’s sovereignty (Daniel 3:16-18).” [John Owen.]
  - ✓ **Escaped the edge of the sword** — Perhaps a reference to Elijah (escaping Jezebel, 1 Kings 19) or Elisha (escaping Jehoram, 2 Kings 6:30-33).
  - ✓ **From weakness were made strong** — This could be a statement for all these (and all God’s people). God’s pattern is to use weak things to accomplish His purposes to demonstrate that He is the One who is acting (cf. 1 Cor. 1:27; see also 2 Cor. 12:10; 13:9).
  - ✓ **Became mighty in war** — similar to the first clause “conquered kingdoms,” it emphasizes that their might was not in themselves but the One who fought for them (cf. **1 Kings 20:27-30**).
  - ✓ **Put foreign armies to flight** — As with Joshua against Ai (Josh. 8), Gideon (Judg. 7:21ff) and more!
  - ✓ **Women received back their dead** — The great enemy and supposed final victor is death; God used several instances of resuscitation to demonstrate His ultimate victory: the sons of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:22, under Elijah) and the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:34, under Elisha).

The readers were also likely compelled to think of Jesus resuscitating the son of the widow of Nain (Lk. 7:11ff) and His friend Lazarus (Jn. 11:43-44) as well as His own resurrection.

- ✓ Here are 10 examples of faithful living and victorious accomplishments. In all these, it looked impossible. But God was victorious — there is nothing beyond the capability of God (Mt. 19:26).
- What is notable in this section, though is not what they did, but what their character was like — they acted in faith. Notice the opening phrase of v. 33 — **who by faith...** Everything they did was predicated on their trust in God (and not a trust in themselves).
  - ✓ They lived faithfully to the Lord and did not give up following God when they faced hardships.
  - ✓ “The achievements of these heroes of faith stand enshrined in Scripture as evidences of God’s power, and also of God’s honoring of those who will trust Him and do His will.” [Kent]
  - ✓ “Like all these people, you and I need divine help. It will never work to try to obey in our own strength. But with the help of the Spirit, obedience is the inevitable result of God’s grace working through us by faith. Who knows what he may accomplish through us?” [Kruger, *Hebrews For You*.]
  - ✓ God’s victories in all these circumstances establish our priority: *be faithful and who knows what God might be pleased to do?*

### 3. The Victorious SUFFERINGS of Faith (vv. 35b-38)

- In the middle of v. 35, the writer makes a transition — **and others**. He moves from the blessings received by those who were faithful to the difficulties incurred by those who were faithful. His emphasis is that some faithful people did not experience lives of ease. Westcott calls what follows this transition as “victorious sufferings” (i.e., there *is* suffering, but there is a kind of victory for those who suffered, which he will affirm in vv. 39-40). *There is victory in suffering; not all suffering is loss*.
  - ✓ They were **tortured, not accepting their release** — The word **tortured** was used elsewhere about stretching a skin tightly over a kettle drum and then beating it (musically). The word suggests a savage beating. They might have been able to be released if they had taken a stand against God (as with Sennacherib’s threats in 2 Kings 19:8ff). They endured and were tortured for their faith. Why endure such suffering? They were looking to eternal life not earthly life — they were living with their eyes on eternity (cf. 11:13ff). They believed in the final reward from God (11:6).
  - ✓ **Others experienced mockings and scourgings** — These are verbal insults that are given along with physical beatings (e.g., Jer. 20:2, 7); and certainly our Savior on the cross.
  - ✓ **Yes, also chains and imprisonment** — This is the extent and climax of mockings and scourgings; perhaps men like Joseph might be in his mind (Gen. 39:20).
  - ✓ **Stoned** — Not just suffering, but being put to death; the Jews were known for stoning God’s prophets, as Jesus Himself said (Mt. 23:37; cf. the priest Zechariah, 2 Chron. 24:21).
  - ✓ **Sawn in two** — traditionally, this was the fate of Isaiah.

- ✓ **Tempted** — Some have wondered how “temptation” could be considered suffering. But temptations to abandon God and pursue the world are strong and deadly (cf. Moses, vv. 24-26).
- ✓ **Put to death with the sword** — This might be a reference to defeat in war or perhaps a reference to Uriah the prophet (Jer. 26:23), or to martyrdom in general.
- ✓ **In sheepskins...** — Many prophets wore this kind of clothing (Elijah, 2 Kings 1:8); the point is that they were destitute and did not have anything else to wear. They lacked basic necessities. It is sign of their **affliction** and **ill-treatment**. They were not cared for and no one cared that they lacked care.
- ✓ **Wandering in deserts...** — That they wandered indicated they had no permanent home (cf. **11:13**) and that they lived in solitude.
  - **Caves and holes...** suggests that their only residence was not *on* this earth, but *under this earth*. They lived in uninhabitable places because that was the only “safe” place from the world and the only place they could afford.
  - They were alone in this world. They were marginalized, hated, and persecuted. Created by God for relationship, many had no relationships on earth to encourage and sustain them.
- That list of sufferings is sobering. And just how is the writer using that list to encourage the readers?
  - ✓ He is using it to affirm that whatever they are suffering, they are not alone and their situation is not unusual. Ostracism and hatred from the world are normal for the follower of God and Christ.
  - ✓ Cf. **Jn. 15:20**; Phil. 3:10; **2 Tim. 3:12**. Let us not have as our goal easy and suffering-free lives.
  - ✓ His other point is that even when we suffer injustice and harm, we can accept it, knowing that whatever we lose on earth, we cannot lose Heaven and final redemption if we are in Christ. The world and the persecutor who can kill our bodies but cannot take away our lives (**Lk. 12:4**).

“There is a sad trend in evangelicalism today of teachers claiming that if you follow God it will make your life better in earthly ways. Of course, it is better to follow Jesus; but that does not mean bigger bank accounts or more popularity. This is not your best life now. You could be hated; you could be persecuted; you could be put in jail.” [Kruger, *Hebrews for You*.]

- ✓ And if loss, jail, and death is our earthly destiny, there is still victory for us, which is the conclusion:

#### **4. The Victorious HOPE of Faith (vv. 39-40)**

- The writer comes to the end of this section and summarizes — **all these...**, referring to vv. 32-38, but also probably to everyone in this chapter. The summary he makes is true for all OT believers...
  - ✓ They **gained approval through their faith** — that is, they had faith in God and God “testified” (which is what “gained approval” means) that they were His people (cf. **11:2**, 4-5).
  - ✓ Yet despite being God’s people, they didn’t receive the fulfillment of the Promise made to them. They did receive “partial payments” (v. 33), but they didn’t receive the full gift.

- ✓ The writer means they did not receive the promise of the Messiah and the installation of the MK.
  - ✓ They received answers to prayers and temporal provisions and fulfillment of some promises; but they did not receive the full promise of God's covenant with Abraham.
  - ✓ They received enough to make them trust the faithfulness of God, but they still had to keep looking for the final provision from God.
- Why did they have to wait? Verse 40 — ***because God had promised something better for us...***
    - ✓ They didn't receive what they had been promised because God had something better (which included ***us***) — a better hope, better covenant, better promises, better high priest, better access to God, better sacrifice, better possession, and a better resurrection.
    - ✓ Yet even while they had to wait "for us," the One who came who was better was also the means by which they would be ***made perfect*** (completed). How would they be made perfect "through us?" It was through the advent of Christ and His cross-work that the fulfillment of the promises would be made to both the OT saints and the present-day readers of this letter.
    - ✓ They looked forward to Christ and were made complete; we look backward to Christ and are made complete. All of us are dependent on Christ for our salvation.
  - While we look back and can clearly see the provision of Christ who has been provided for us, we (like the OT saints) don't yet have everything either:

"Even New Testament saints should expect hardships and persecutions until Christ returns. Indeed, Paul suffered for Christ and this forced him to look to the future:...(Philippians 3:8-9, 13-14)...If you follow God, you do not get it all now. In Christ you do get it all; but you get it on that final day when Christ looks at you and says, 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (Matthew 25:23)." [Michael Kruger]

- ✓ While the OT saints didn't receive everything, they still trust that God would fulfill His promise.
- ✓ Though we haven't received everything yet, God will still fulfill His promise. Don't despair.

## CONCLUSION:

Nicholas Ridley, the Bishop of London, and Hugh Latimer, the Bishop of Worcester were burned at the stake together in Oxford on the 16th of October, 1555. Theologian J. C. Ryle said that "Next to [Thomas] Cranmer, there can be little doubt that no two men did so much to bring about the establishment of the principles of the Reformation in England." They were among the first martyrs under Queen Mary; their offense was simply that they would not recant that the elements of communion were not the literal body and blood of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Ryle recounts their martyrdom:

On the day of their martyrdom they were brought separately to the place of execution, which was at the end of Broad Street, Oxford, close to Balliol College. Ridley arrived on the ground first, and seeing Latimer come afterwards, ran to him and kissed him, saying, “Be of good heart, brother; for God will either assuage the fury of the flames, or else strengthen us to abide it.” They then prayed earnestly, and talked with one another, though no one could hear what they said. After this they had to listen to a sermon by a wretched renegade divine named Smith, and, being forbidden to make any answer, were commanded to make ready for death.

Ridley’s last words before the fire was lighted were these,—“Heavenly Father, I give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast called me to a profession of Thee even unto death. I beseech Thee, Lord God, have mercy on this realm of England, and deliver the same from all her enemies.” Latimer’s last words were like the blast of a trumpet, which rings even to this day,—“Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day, by God’s grace, light such a candle in England as I trust shall never be put out.”

When the flames began to rise, Ridley cried out with a loud voice in Latin, “Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit: Lord, receive my spirit,” and afterwards repeated these last words in English. Latimer cried as vehemently on the other side of the stake, “Father of heaven, receive my soul.” [Ryle, *Five Leading Reformers.*]

Did these men lose? Were they failures? In this world, yes, they lost their lives. But in the tradition of the flawed people of faith in Hebrews 11, they maintained their faith in the perfect, unflawed God of Glory. He kept them to the end, in the end, and into Glory.

As we struggle with the difficulties, trials, sufferings, and persecutions of this world, let us similarly maintain our confidence in God, who will not fail us, but will always be faithful to accomplish His good purposes. That’s what victorious faith is — believing, trusting, relying on God to be ultimately victorious when life is harsh.

**BENEDICTION:** [Hebrews 13:20-21](#)