**“Faith in Victory, Faith in Defeat”**

**Hebrews 11:1-3, 6, 32-38; 12:1-3**

(notes based on the sermon by Nathan Martin, Hayden Bible Church, 6/27/21)

Hebrews 11:4-31 gives us a legacy list of people with great faith in God, people trusting in the power of God. Faith was required for all those victories. Then in verse 35 there is a pivot: the outcome of faith is not always a victory. The author of Hebrews is writing to a seriously persecuted people. His message: faith produces perseverance, but not always success or victory or healing.

Hebrews 11:35 also contains an interesting phrase: “not accepting their release”. That means that these martyrs didn’t recant their faith in order to get the torture to stop. In essence they were saying, “Even if you kill me, I’m trusting my God to raise me again.” Martyrs and almost martyrs have shared that same sentiment for over 4,000 years. Job said, “Even though He slay me, I will hope in Him.” (Job 13:15a) Read Dan. 3:17-18 to see how Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego put it. It’s the heart of a martyr to be willing to give your life for Jesus. True faith in life, true faith in death. See how Jesus Himself put it in Matt. 16:24-25. Jim Elliot, before he was martyred in South America, wrote, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” In fact, the 20th century had by far the highest number of martyrs for Christ. The 21st century is on a pace to exceed even that.

Consider Stephen, John the Baptist, Paul, and all the other apostles who suffered and died for Christ. Paul details some of his sufferings in 2Cor. 11:23-27. How did he endure? Read Rom. 8:18 to hear his perspective. Martin Luther can be put in the category of “almost martyr”. He went to bed one night expecting to trade his life the next day just to hold to the truth of justification by faith in Jesus alone. He was spared, but it leads us to this point: sometimes living for the Lord is harder than dying for the Lord. Both require faith. Is God involved with these martyrs? Does He know about these acts of faith? Read Rev. 6:9-11. Not only does God know each one, He knows the fixed number of martyrs before He says, “Enough!”

Jesus is not only the Chief Shepherd, but He is the chief among martyrs. He is the certain hope of things to come. He is the Son of God AND the Son of Man, fully dependent on God, and a living example of what humanity SHOULD be. His death by crucifixion was designed for sadistic cruelty. The Romans used gravity to prolong the torture and suffering. His legs were bent at an angle so that He couldn’t breathe unless He pushed up on the spikes in His ankles. He would almost suffocate, then push up in pain, over and over and over again. But unlike the other martyrs (who foreshadowed His death) Jesus also faced spiritual torture. He had to endure separation from His Father for the first (and only) time in eternity. His distress was not that He would die, but that He would have to take upon Himself the wrath of God for your sin and my sin and the sins of all who would believe in Him. Only a perfect Man/God could be our substitutionary sacrifice. Read Matt. 27:46 for the ultimate expression of grief. Read Luke 23:46 for the ultimate expression of faith. For us, Jesus gives a warning in Matt. 10:28. This passage talks about God and His righteous judgment. Fortunately, Jesus Himself provides a way out!

This is the KEY: whether our faith turns into victory or defeat is God’s business.

This is the PROMISE: Your soul will NEVER be separated from Christ (Rom. 8:35).

This is the COMMISSION: “…let us run with endurance the race set before us…” (Heb. 12:1-3). Amen.

**QUESTIONS**:

1. Hebrews was written to some who were amazed by Jesus, but not believers. There were also many who had a believing faith. What is a believing faith?
2. Explain Jim Elliot’s quote in your own words.
3. Nathan said, “Sometimes living for the Lord is harder than dying for the Lord.” Do you agree? Explain.
4. How does Heb. 11 and 12:1-3 point us to faith in Jesus?
5. Why would Jesus Himself need faith?
6. Do you think Jesus was afraid to face crucifixion? Why or why not?
7. What does it mean to “fix our eyes on Jesus”?
8. What is the race set before **you**?

“Victory in Jesus” (Bartlett)

I heard an old, old story,

How a Savior came from glory,

How He gave His life on Calvary

To save a wretch like me;

I heard about His groaning,

Of His precious blood’s atoning,

Then I repented of my sins

And won the victory.

Chorus

O victory in Jesus,

My Savior, forever.

He sought me and bought me

With His redeeming blood;

He loved me ere I knew Him

And all my love is due Him,

He plunged me to victory,

Beneath the cleansing flood.