

Emmanuel Service

21.3.21

Service Order:

Welcome

Song – God Speaks we listen

All Age slot – animated video

Children and Young People to JAM and Pathfinders

One year on – lament

Song: Great is thy faithfulness

Hero of the Faith: Cara Rodger speaking about Mary Newton

Prayers: David Speed-Andrews

Reading: Heb 11:32-40 Pam Speed-Andrews

Sermon

Song: By faith we see the hand of God

Close

Song: Amazing Grace

Sermon Notes:

The Faith Honours List: Hebrews 11:32-40

We have been focussing on faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

- Many consider faith to be a private matter – just between them and God
- But the Bible never sees faith that way – it must be personal but it is never private.
- In the Faith Honours list of Hebrews 11 none of their contemporaries would have been left wondering whether they really trusted in God – it was clear from their actions.
- They put their faith into practice – and the Bible warns us that faith that is not accompanied by deeds is dead (James 2).
- In our passage today we see a long list of what heroes of faith in the Old Testament did...

1. Conquering through Faith v32-35

- We begin with a list of 6 names – all worth looking up in our Bibles to read about.
- Then we see the list of things they, and others, did and it is an impressive list – I won't go through them all but will pick out a few.
- They 'conquered Kingdoms' – Gideon for instance in Judges 6-7, conquered the oppressive Midianites with an army outnumbered 450:1.
- They 'shut the mouths of lions' – Samson ripped a lion in half with his bare hands, Daniel was kept safe in the lion's den.
- They 'quenched the fury of the flamed' – read Daniel 3.
- Such heroes fill us with awe – they seem incredible and must have been strong people.
- But if we think that, we have completely missed the point!
- See v34 – their weakness was turned to strength and they became powerful in battle.
- They did these things through faith.

So they themselves were weak and very flawed – staggeringly so!

- For instance read Judges 6 – Gideon was not an impressive person, and he knew it.
- Faith is not a power in itself, we have faith when we see we are weak and need God's strength and so throw ourselves on him for help.
- The strength is not in us but in God – faith connects us to God.

So how are you feeling? Weak? Flawed?

- God loves to use people like us for his purposes because there is no way anyone would think we had achieved them by ourselves, it can only be God.
- Those who come to him he washes clean and then empowers to do His purposes.

- So we too are to go and take risks, take action, looking to the Lord for strength and giving him the thanks and glory when there are victories.
- But before we go to take risks – we do need to read the next part of the chapter...

2. Suffering through Faith v35-38

The list changes tone quite suddenly – we aren't reading about conquering but torture, death, poverty and suffering.

- Have a read of the list, some bits are staggering and you will ask, how did they stay faithful?
- The answer is, again, through faith!
- It requires just as much strength from God to endure suffering as to conquer a nation.
- The saints who suffered and died for their faith did so not because they were strong but because God is strong and he strengthened them – so if He can do it for them He can do it for you and me.
- Are you finding things tough?
 - Maybe you are the only Christian in your family, workplace or friendship group.
 - Maybe you fear future sufferings, illness, rejection or death.
 - How will we keep going in faith through trials? Only by faith, through knowing our weakness and looking to the Lord to strengthen us.
- So we are to take risks, take action, and whether we conquer or suffer, we do so through faith looking to the Lord to strengthen us.
- One last thing...

3. We have a greater reason to take risks v39-40

The writer concludes this section showing that we are in a better position than the Old Testament saints because we have something they didn't (read verses 39-40).

- There is a promise they didn't receive (notice in v33 they did receive promises – this is plural, many promises - but v39 talks of a singular promise they didn't receive).
- The promise they didn't receive is something we have and it is about being made perfect.
- You might think this refers to future perfection at the resurrection, but the argument of Hebrews says this perfection is one Christians have received.
- The letter of Hebrews has argued that the Old Covenant, though good, is not as good as the New Covenant that it anticipated.
- In the Old Covenant the saints of the Old Testament had to offer, at the temple, sacrifices for their sins. They had to offer them over and over again – day after day, year after year.
 - This showed that the sacrifices never really dealt with sins – read Hebrews 10:1-14.
- But in the New Covenant Jesus is the better sacrifice who was sacrificed 'once for all' (a recurring phrase in Hebrews).
 - His sacrifice dealt with sins (so we mustn't make any more sacrifices – Jesus' death did away with the need for them)
 - And therefore read Hebrews 10:14! We have been made perfect.
 - We still sin, and so are those being 'made holy', but we have been perfected by Christ's death.
- This perfection through Christ is something Gideon, Samson etc would have loved to have received – they do receive it but didn't in their lifetimes.
- But we have received it and our task is not to conquer Kingdoms but to take the message of Jesus to those lost without Christ.
- And we are to take risks taking it to others
 - We go not knowing the outcome – they may turn to Jesus, they may hate us.
 - But we go and we take risks because we know that it is only through Jesus we and they can be forgiven – made perfect.
 - So we are to go to all people – whatever their race, religion, sexuality and age. If these old testament saints took the risk they did, we have even more reason.
 - And we go relying on God, by faith.