

Of Whom the World Was Not Worthy

Hebrews 11:32-40

Have you ever heard the phrase “meta-narrative?”

A “meta-narrative” is the big story that covers everything.

- You may read a book or see a movie that has a lot of things going on in it but there is one primary narrative that is driving all the other story lines.
- The “meta-narrative” of Star Wars is the battle between good (the force) and evil (darth vader).
- ... light and dark.

Well, that is also true of human history.

The “meta-narrative” of all of history is the story of the creator’s behavior with His creation.

- His merciful revelation of Himself to His creation.

And this story has shaped the way we have looked at the world for 4800 years.

In fact, this story has shaped the way we in the West have seen and understood the world ... even those people who have not believed in God.

... but in the late 1800’s (19th century) that changed.

In the 19th century this meta-narrative that was shaped by the Bible and a common belief in God was discarded in favor of **modernity**—

... this was what humanism and ultimately the enlightenment was all about, and it found its greatest prophet in the philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche.

With the discarding of God, this new meta-narrative was driven by a self-created, self-centered approach to science, politics, economics.

... the belief in God was displaced by the enthronement of man.

... man was going to usher in an industrial, technological, social and political utopia.

However, that meta-narrative began to fall apart with the death of Nietzsche ... the prophet of modernity's decadence.

... and perhaps this was accelerated by two very awful world wars.

No longer was there any belief in any kind of a "grand story" or meta-narrative.

... before long modernity gave way to post-modernity which gave way to something else...

... Philosophers have concluded that we live in a time where there is no consistent world view.

Regardless of the facts everyone creates their own narrative...

... the "best life" is the life you conceive in your mind and speak into existence

... everyone creates their own vision of what the good life is and puts in on social media...

... and if that narrative falls apart from too many holes, they will disappear from social media for 10 months and then return with a new reinvented narrative and story.

In other words, this is a time of insanity because there is no coherent story in which to understand the world of our day.

This is why an absolute belief and confidence in the Word of God is one of those five foundational stones that are necessary for sound doctrine ...

... the opinions of humanity changes ... popular beliefs come and go

So, what we have here in Hebrews 11 a clear reminder of the **biblical meta-narrative** that goes from the beginning of time and it ends pointing us to the new heavens and the new earth ...

... this chapter reminds us that the most significant thing that has happened in time and space is this relationship between the creator and His creation ...

... How God deals with us based upon our response of faith in Him.

So, as we come to the end of this chapter, we see a description of a series of witnesses and their deeds of faith ...

Today I want you to see 3 things:

1. God is a God of Victories

³² And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Heb. 11:32-34)

The writer of Hebrews now gives us a bird's eye view of just a few of the ways that God has brought victory to His people.

There were many people powerfully used by God in the history of Israel, but here is an abbreviated list.

Gideon did not start off as a courageous man—he was a coward.

He was so afraid of the Midianites that he hid in a winepress.

... thankfully God did not leave him there.

... the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said: “The Lord is with you thou mighty man of valor.”

At that moment he quit believing what he thought about himself and began to believe what God said about him.

... and if you remember the story, Gideon had such faith that he left behind an army of 32k soldiers to go fight the Midianites with just 300 men—And God gave him the victory!

Then there is **Barak** was the commander of Israel's army, but he was also afraid and didn't want to go fight against Sisera's mighty army.

So, God sent Deborah to go to Barak's home in Kadesh and she ordered Barak, in the name of the LORD, to take ten thousand men to Mount Tabor and fight against Sisera.

Barak only agreed to go on one condition, that Deborah would go with him.

She did and in the end Barak's army killed most of Sisera's army, Sisera fled from the battlefield, and the victory was won.

Then there is **Samson**.

God gave him amazing strength, but Samson loved women more than he loved God.

He was tricked by Delilah, his hair was cut off, his strength was gone, and he was forced to push a millstone, like a donkey, to grind grain for the Philistines.

Then Samson repented, his hair grew back, his strength returned, and he destroyed the temple of Dagon.

In his death Samson killed more of God's enemies than he ever did in his life ... and the victory was won.

ARE YOU SEEING THE PATTERN YET?

Every one of these heroes of the faith were deeply flawed people.

Victory was never anything they achieved ...

... victory was something God gave them.

A complete list of Israel's heroes would be much longer but the same thing would be true with every one of them... **THEY**

- conquered kingdoms
- performed acts of righteousness
- obtained promises
- shut the mouths of lions
- quenched the power of fire
- escaped the edge of the sword
- strong or mighty in war
- put foreign armies to flight

But it was never them doing it in their strength ... It was always God!

When it comes to active, dynamic faith, victory is not ours—it is never ours...

... Victory belongs to God.

God is a God of victory ... and we are only a people of victory because we belong to HIM!

2. God is the God of Resurrection

³⁵ *Women received back their dead by resurrection (Hebrews 11:35)*

This is a small phrase but a huge transition in the text ...

This short statement is a reference back to the prophets:

... **Elijah** (I Kings 17, widow of Zaraphath and her son dies and he is raised)

... **Elisha** (2 Kings 4 a Shunamite woman's son is resurrected) ...

Both of these stories emphasize this tremendous theme that God can bring resurrection ...

... That God is the God of resurrection

- When Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and life" ... he is echoing what has been revealed about God throughout the old testament
- God is resurrection, he is life in Himself...
- These historical accounts, however, are more than that just historical fact
- ... these events were prophetic miracles about resurrection and immortality...
 - ... like with the rescue of **Isaac in Gen. 22**, who was already as good as dead
 - ... the **Hebrews in the fiery furnace** but instead of being consumed are delivered by the fourth man in the fire
 - ... Daniel who was as good as dead in the lion's den but went unharmed
 - ... or Jonah who was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights

Resurrection (to be preserved, to survive, through what is certain death and destruction, is one of the great themes in the bible

... and all of these stories find their fullest expression in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

... **and not only Jesus' resurrection** but by extension by our resurrection at the end of time.

You must remember that Jesus' resurrection (and our coming resurrection) is quite different from the resurrection of those two boys in the lives of Elijah and Elisha.

... they were resurrected back to the same life they left ... resurrected only to die again later...

Our resurrection however, will usher us into the very life of God!

... because we Jesus appears, we shall be like Him because WE will see Jesus just as He is!

The resurrection is the very capstone of all of God's redemptive work.

This is where our real hope comes from ...

... NOT from the power of positive thinking.

... Not from a motivational seminar

... Our hope comes from the certainty of the resurrection!

1 Peter says, "*we have a living hope BECAUSE OF Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead.*"

It's all about the resurrection!

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that if there was no resurrection, we would of all people be the most miserable.

- God is A God of Victory
- God is THE God of Resurrection

3. God's People are a People of Endurance

What is it that gives God's people the ability to endure through even the most difficult situations?

THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION!!!

³⁵ *Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35)*

Look at the word tortured; this is the Greek word **τυμπανίζω** (tumpanitzo)

... it means to stretch out and beat as a drum.

Torture: The victim was stretched out like the skin on the top of a drum and beaten.

... pulled on a rack and beaten with instruments.

Many commentators believe that the author of Hebrews is thinking of the 90-year-old Maccabean scribe Eleazar who in 166 BC with 7 of his brothers were captured by king Antiochus IV Epiphanes and commanded to renounce the law God and their allegiance to God.

When that happened, the old man shouted that they would rather die than turn away from the true God.

The soldiers tore off his clothes, tied his arms behind him and whipped him while shouting "Obey the king's orders."

History tells us he kept his eyes raised toward heaven while the whips tore his flesh until the pain became too great and his body fell to the ground.

Then they begin to kick and beat him more, but he refused to deny God with such a courageous and noble spirit that it is said even the soldiers were amazed by his courage.

See, the devil is a liar and murderer from the beginning.

He has no hesitation to do anything to destroy the lives and derail the faith of God's people.

However, I need you to see that **THIS IS ALL THE DEVIL CAN DO!**

All Satan can do is target your human flesh ... your physical body ...

Satan has no power over your soul!

... Satan has no power over your relationship with God.

... **but** he will use all the power of hell against your physical existence to try and get you to renounce your faith.

So how do we endure in such hardships...

- We keep our eyes on the promise of eternal glory
- We remember that our present troubles are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed
- We remind ourselves that nothing in all creation (not even death or the sword) can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord
- We never forget that our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus has promised to be our very present help in time of trouble
- He is our strong deliverer
- He is our great reward.
- He is our shield and fortress.

You see, the devil doesn't care about your body, hurting your body is not really what he is after ...

... he just wants to use pain and sorrow to bring down your soul and draw you away from God.

... so, when the pressure comes Satan will say (deny God/don't stand for the truth/give) and if you do you'll be released from the pressures of persecution ...

- If you'll turn you back on God things won't be so bad.
- If you'll deny this truth or ignore this sin ... things will go better for you.
- If you stand up for this biblical principle even your Christian friends will think you are crazy ... isn't it best to just keep silent and let it go ...
- Just let this thing pass ... it's not such a big deal

King Antiochus Epiphanes offered the old man Eleazar a "get out of torture free card" ... just deny God and His law ...

... but Eleazar refused to accept release!

... The old man was tortured but ... he kept his eyes fixed on the promised resurrection!

But the writer of Hebrews continues ...

³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ³⁸ (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. (Heb. 11:36-38)

I want you to see that our Lord cares and understands even through the different types and levels of pain and testing that we may have to endure ...

Chains ... Imprisonments ... mocking ... taunting ... whippings ...

Let's be clear ...

- ... people taunting us for being true to what we believe ...
- ... being mocked and falsely accused for having biblical values
- ... being misrepresented by so-called friends

... it hurts to suffer these fake accusations and misrepresentations ...

The world is never more witty nor doth more please itself, than when it can invent reproachful names and terms and crimes and hurl them at the believer. -John Owen

- Stephen in Acts 7 was accused of blasphemy and sedition.
- Paul was accused, by the Pharisees, for the same thing.
- All of the old testament prophets were hated and persecuted by their fellow countrymen.

We should be ready for such things ...

It should not surprising when we see that the world is not a friend to grace ...

And we need to be warned that these taunts and mocking of people we personally know and love, can be as hard (if not harder) than the whips and chains.

... PLEASE HEAR ME TODAY ... When this happens don't let it shake your faith ...

... As the Apostle Paul said, "all that will live godly will suffer persecution."

... Jesus said, "if they persecuted me be sure that they will persecute you too."

And the writer of Hebrews wants us to know that in all of this God will give us grace.

In the New Testament we read that Paul has a thorn in the flesh that God doesn't take away.

... now the "thorn in the flesh" is never defined (we don't really know what it is) and that is a good thing.

... because if had been defined (if we knew exactly what it was) we would read that passage and say, "that's Paul's problem and not mine, so the promise doesn't apply to me."

... that's how we are.

But God leaves it undefined so that when we read it, when God tells Paul he's not going to take his thorn away ...

... so we will also know through our thorns in the flesh that **GOD'S GRACE IS ALSO SUFFICIENT FOR US!**

No matter where you are at, no matter what you are going through, there is Grace to meet you at the point of your need.

C.H. Spurgeon was once asked if he was prepared to be burned at the stake as a martyr if it came to it.

"Well, since you asked me, sitting as I am in this very comfortable chair, I could not think that I could confidently say that I am. However, I believe that should the time come when I would face such a choice, I believe that God would give me grace to burn for my Savior."

NOW if that is true for martyrdom (and I believe it is) it is certainly also true for chains, imprisonments, mocking, and beatings.

No matter where you are at, no matter what you are going through, there is Grace to meet you at the point of your need.

There is grace for EVERY trial.

God NEVER abandons his people!

I want to leave you with two very powerful things the writer of Hebrews says regarding His people.

First:

of whom the world was not worthy (v.38)

Now the writer of Hebrews is not talking about creation he is talking about the world system ...

... the spirit god of this age ... the culture that is loved ... the values that are held by people who cannot see beyond this universe...

... this world has a high opinion of itself

... it sees itself as the definer of all values

... the judge of all opinions

... the criteria of all success

... the epitome of all that is good

AND THE WORLD CONSIDERS THE PEOPLE OF GOD NOT WORTHY OF IT!

(HA, HA) ... But God turns all that upside down.

God says, “NO! The world is not worthy of My people!”

These celebrities and the power brokers, the great, the mighty, and the wealthy, and the rulers of this world ...

... are not worthy of even the humblest believer

... not worthy of the most obscure follower of the Lord Jesus Christ!

And there is one final thing:

³⁹ And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. (Heb. 11:39-40)

All these have gained (or are commended) for their faith ...

- Who **commends** them? God.
- Who **sees** them? God sees them.
- Who **recognizes and acknowledges** what they have done? God does.

You may be in your small corner of the world holding on to Jesus Christ ... be assured of this one thing my dear friend ... God sees you. God commends you.

And although those in the Old Testament didn't receive the promise ... the Messiah didn't come in their lifetime.

- He has now come!
- We know His name is Jesus!
- We know HE is risen indeed!

The writer is clear that we live in a better place, because we know more than they knew.

... but look.

so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

Here is what this last phrase means... we share the same faith as they had.

We will not enter into the resurrection life without them or ahead of them ...

At the same moment we will all receive the **same resurrection**, the **glorified body**, and be **ushered into His presence to see the infinite glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ AT THE SAME MOMENT!**

Together we will with all the saints, who from their labors rest be ushered into God's glory!

- As 1 Thessalonians those alive will not precede those who have already gone
- ... we will be caught up together with them in the clouds of glory to meet the Lord in the air
- ... and so united will we ever be together with the Lord.

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; ¹⁰ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9-10)