



# Message **Transcript**

## The Celebration of Faith

Jeff Schwarzentraub

This morning I want to talk about the celebration of faith. As we've been going through the book of Hebrews and we've landed in Hebrews chapter 11, we've been talking about faith and what faith looks like. We defined that first week what faith is, the assurance of things hope for, the evidence of things not seen. Then we talked about challenges to our faith. What makes it difficult for us to step out into faith and actually take the next step of faith? Then last week we took a look at four specific steps of faith that you can take no matter what you can do. And as this author is now wrapping up this chapter, he's going to highlight the entire Old Testament and he's going to talk about why faith is worthy of being celebrated.

Just think of it. For those of us who know Jesus Christ, when we meet him face to face, what's he going to say? Well done, good, and...

Faithful.

Faithful servant. It's our faithfulness to him. It's our taking steps that are congruent with what he's showing us in our life. That's so important. And so often when we come to church and we talk about faith, it's so rigid. It feels like this formula, or it feels like this have to, or, "I must do this. And if I do this and this and this, then God will this and this and this." And we forget the fact that God of the universe wants to work in and through us. And when he does, that's worthy of being celebrated. When people get married, when people have celebration, that's what they do. They dance. Even when the lost son came home, what was there? Music and dancing. I know for many of us, we're like, "I'm not going to dance in heaven." Oh, you'll be dancing. Oh, there

will be music. I mean, it's going to be a celebration. And so often when we come to faith, we get so religious and we think so hard that we forget the joy that's set before us. We forget the faith that God wants to work in and through us.

So if you want to know about four reasons that we can celebrate God, four faithfulness that we see in ourselves and others, then God has a word for you today. So I encourage you to open up your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 11. We'll start in verse 30. I'll read through the end of the chapter and then we'll take a look at four reasons to celebrate God for his faithfulness in and through his people. Notice what he says.

He says, "By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith, Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient after she had welcomed the spies in peace. 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 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escape the edge of the sword."

"From weakness they were made strong, became mighty and war, put foreign armies to flight, women received back their dead by resurrection. And others were tortured, not accepting their release so that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others experienced mockings and scourgings, just also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were tempted. They were put to death with sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated. Men of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and

mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these having gained approval through their faith did not receive what was promised because God had provided something better for us so that apart from us, they would not be made perfect."

And here, as he rounds out his thoughts in chapter 11 about what faith is and the challenges of faith and how we can live a life of faith, he's going to talk about the celebration of faith. He's going to talk about what it looks like and why God should be celebrated when his people are faithful, when individuals are faithful, when groups of people are faithful and ultimately the culmination of the celebration of faith, when we meet him face to face. And the first is this, the first of these four that he highlights is that we should celebrate God when justice and mercy triumph together. We should celebrate God when justice and mercy triumph together.

Notice how he starts, "By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days." Now, the verse prior that we talked about last week was when God parted the Red Sea and they walked through it. From that verse until the walls of Jericho falling down, how much time has elapsed? 40 years. Do you know why? Because after God brought 10 plagues to Egypt, after God showed his faithfulness over and over by leading them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, after God showed them his faithfulness by parting the Red Sea and letting them all cross and after God showed his faithfulness of crushing the Egyptian enemy and after God showed his faithfulness of providing food in the desert and after he provided quail and manna and water and after he showed them that he was with them, they got to the banks of the Jordan.

They got to where they were ready to cross over and do what God had promised, which was to give them the land that he had already promised to give them. So Moses sends out who? He sends out 12 spies to spy on the land, just to get a lay of the land so they know what they're going to take over when they go in. And you remember what happened? All 12 come back, 10 of the spies said, "We can't do this. We look like grass hoppers in their sight. They're bigger people. They're fortified cities. I know what God says, and God is wrong. There's no way we can do this." And then there were two there. Remember who they were?

Yeah.

Joshua and Caleb. These two men said, "No, no, no, they're big, they're strong, but our God's bigger and stronger than they are. We got to take the land. Let's go." Unfortunately, the majority won out like it usually does. And so God's punishment was to give them a 40 year camping trip in the wilderness. At which time every single person who was unfaithful would die off. The only people left when they were ready to go cross the Jordan and go take Jericho were who? Moses-

Joshua and Caleb.

I'm sorry. Joshua and Caleb. That's it. Joshua and Caleb. So after reading through this passage, we read about, they cross the Red Sea and God did all this great stuff. Now we got a 40 year gap. And now what? Now come down the walls of Jericho. God is always faithful to his promise. God's faithfulness is always worthy of being celebrated. If God says he's going to do it, he always does it. When we read

about prophetic words of Jesus Christ coming back, he's always been true to everything he's saying, which means he's going to be true to Jesus Christ coming back. Everything's true. And what do we see here? We see God's justice put on display when the walls of Jericho come tumbling down. After 40 years of unfaithfulness, they're now faithing again. God gives them a plan.

Do you remember the plan? It was a ridiculous, dangerous, embarrassing plan. I mean, you think about it. After they're ready to go, they have to cross the Jordan. In order to get across the Jordan, they have to believe that God's going to part the Jordan. Well, he has already parted the Red Sea. Now he's going to do it for this generation. So they take the priest into the water. The priest have to believe that by the time they step their foot in the water, that the waters are going to be pushed back. And that's exactly what happens. And they go stand in the middle while everybody crosses. Then they pick up 12 stones and bring it back so they can remember so that when the children ask their fathers, "Daddy, what do these stones mean?" They can tell them how faithful our God is.

And now they're ready to take Jericho, the first fortified city. And what's God going to do? He gives them a plan. What's the plan? "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to take the priest upfront. I want you to worship me around by blowing horns, but I don't want you to say a word to each other. On the first day, I want you to march around the city once and then come back home. On the second day, I want you to march around the city once, then come back home. On the third day, I want you to arch around the city once and come back home. And you do that for six days. And then

on the seventh day, I want you to arch around seven times around the city. And when I yell, "Shout," shout. Ready? Let's go."

Yeah. [inaudible 00:08:07].

I mean, you talk about an embarrassing plan. You talk about a dangerous plan. I mean, these cities were so fortified that two chariots could fit in the width of that city wall. I mean, they're huge. You were at a massive disadvantage because people are armed up top looking down on you. So you have to trust they're not going to shoot you. And you're not allowed to talk, which was really good because I can only imagine what Israel will be saying to each other. "This is the dumbest thing we've ever done, bro. We're going to get killed." I mean, they're not grumbling. They're not complaining. I mean, they've already been through 40 years. They're not going to do that. So they stay silent. And on the seventh day, what does God do? He tells them to shout. They shout and all the walls come crumbling down. And they go in and they don't spare anybody.

That's God's justice. Do you know why? Because God knew that the people of Canaan were wicked. He knows people in a way we don't know people. He gave those people a chance to repent and nobody repented except one that we're going to read about here in a second. The whole city's annihilated, the whole city's killed. Israel wins. Who gets the glory for that? God does. Because they didn't do anything. All they did was live obediently to what God called them to do. And who gets glory? God does. And God gets justice because God had always promised that land to Israel. That's

their land.

Amen.

Right? That's what he was saying. But now also notice this, there's also mercy that takes place too. Because in verse 31, it says, "By faith, Rahab the harlot," your version may read Rahab the prostitute, "did not perish." She didn't die along with those who are disobedient after she welcomed the spies in peace. So wait a second, you got this rebellious city that's been sacrificing their kids, that's been living completely apart from God, not listening to how they needed to turn to him. And God's pouring out his grace, they want nothing to do with it. So the whole city dies except for who? A woman who's a prostitute by the name of Rahab.

Now you'll recall that 40 years earlier, Moses send in 12 spies. But this time right before they went in, Joshua sends in a couple. And they make their way into the city to try to figure out what's going on. And guess where they make their way to? A prostitute. I mean, if you're just reading through the story of Joshua and you don't know the outcome, you're thinking, "This is not good." I mean, these guys don't need to be hanging out with this prostitute, but why did God leave him there? Because this woman is going to proclaim her faith in the living God. She's going to tell these men that her whole city is scared of who they are and sees the glory of God. And she gives glory to him and says, "I believe that your God is the living God." That's called conversion.

Yes.

Amen.

She said, "What do I need to do?" And they said, "Well, we'll spare you if you don't tell anybody we're coming. And you hang a scarlet thread out your window so that when we come we'll know you and all your family that's in there will be spared, but everybody else is going to die." So she keeps the secret. And when they come, all the walls fall, except for where? Right where Rahab and her family is, and they're all spared. What is that called? That's called mercy. It's called mercy.

Now how do truth and mercy mix? How do justice and mercy mix? We don't think that they mix. Some of us are truth people in the church. Here's truth people in the church. "God has a standard. God is holy. God is righteous. God is good. You need to meet God's standard. If you don't, he's very, very mad at you." Does God have a standard? Is God holy? Is God perfect? Is God righteous? Does God demand that all of us are. As a matter of fact, in the sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." So God demands perfection. But isn't it just as true that mercy is abundant as well? Isn't it true that God's mercies are new how often? Every morning. Isn't it true that though we can't measure up to his standard, he lavishes us with mercy and grace? Isn't it his mercy that brings us to faith in Christ when we recognize he has a standard that we can't keep and he lavishes us with mercy?

See, here's the challenge that I find in the church. The challenge I find in the church is that we all want justice. "Come Lord Jesus, look at our world. It's perishing. It's going to hell in a hand basket. Come Lord Jesus. Bring justice." And we're right to say that when we're talking about other people. But when we're talking about us, we

say, "Lord, we desire mercy. Thank you, Lord Jesus for the mercy that you've given me in my life." And oftentimes in church, we try to lower the bar on both. Some of us like to hold the bar of God's standard so high that nobody can ever attain it, but never ever talk about the grace that's available so that you can be made right with God. And others of us only like to talk about the mercy of God. And it doesn't really matter what God's standards are. Let's lower all those. As long as you're happy, God's willing to give grace. And that's where we come into problem. See, it's God's justice and his mercy that are both active all the time.

If you study the life of Jesus, who did Jesus have the most problem with in his ministry? Truth people, religious people, people that knew the scriptures, people that knew the standard, people that held it high, expected everybody else to keep that standard. That's who Jesus had problems with. You know why? Because they weren't keeping it either. See, when you only have a truth lens, you falsely begin to believe that you're keeping all the truth. And yet the Bible says there's no one good. No, not one. Not one of us keeps all the truth. I mean, if you're here today and you think you've kept every single commandment of Jesus every second of your life, please stand so that you can be recognized. Because I have a couple things I'd like to point out from scriptures you're unaware of. Right?

I mean, and we can be in churches that only champion truth and only tell you the truth. But at the same time, that there's truth, what else is there? You don't measure up at all, but there's mercy for you.

Hallelujah.

God still loves you anyway no matter what. God still cares for you no matter what. No one's good. No, not one. You've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And Jesus extends mercy. Doesn't he do both throughout the New Testament with religious Pharisees and leaders that thought that truth, truth, truth. He tries to show them, "Yeah, but you don't keep any. I mean, you keep some of the law, but you've neglect the greater things like mercy. You tie then you give 10% and do all that, but you forget mercy. You don't care about people. You burden people. You straiten out a knot and you swallow a camel," right?

But what's he do to people that are in need of mercy? A woman that's sitting there ready to be stoned because she's caught in the act of adultery. Even though they don't bring the man in, they bring just the woman in and they shame her and do all these things. And when Jesus is being questioned, like, "Don't you care about the law?" What does he say? "Any of you without sin, go ahead and cast the first stone." Blook, blook, blook, blook. Rocks drop, drop, drop, drop until there's nobody left. He said, "Woman, where are your accusers?" She's like, "Well, they're gone." "Then I don't accuse you either." Then what does he say? Then he takes her back to truth. "Now go and send them more."

I mean, it's truth and grace. It's truth and grace, and both have to be elevated. When we're in church, we have to present that God created us in his image and that he's holy and that he has a standard and that there's righteousness and truth and God

demands and expects us through Christ to live him out. And there also has to be in the same breath in understanding that not one person that's listening can do that apart from Christ. Not one. Not your pastor. Not anybody else on staff. Not at your small group leader. Nobody. None of us measure up. And that God's lavish in his grace and mercy in the same way that he's lavish and has a standard of truth. And that's where they come together.

I mean, in John chapter 1 in verse 17 we read about how the law came through Moses, but grace and truth was revealed through Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't change the standard of the law. He fulfilled it. But when he fulfilled it, he extended mercy and grace. That's why the cross is the most beautiful picture of truth and grace. That's why the cross is the most beautiful picture of justice and mercy all at the same time. Why? Because when Jesus died on the cross, justice was being served.

Amen.

The sin of the world was being paid for. And the only person that could ever pay for it was Jesus. You can't pay for your own sin. You can't work it off. You can't be a good enough person to be perfect. Jesus Christ took the punishment of every single sin, of every single person, because he's the one that could fulfill justice. God the Father demanded justice, Jesus Christ fulfilled justice. When Jesus Christ stretched out his arms and he said it is finished, he was saying, "Justice is served. Sin is atoned for." But what else was he stretching out and saying? "My mercy is more abundant. Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden, I'll give you rest for your soul. Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing."

So while justice is being served, mercy's being extended. That's the gospel. That's the gospel. And if we miss that, it's not a balance. It's 100% and 100%. It's not, "Should I be more truthful or should I be more gracious?" It's yes, you should. We should center our lives on truth and be more gracious when we are. Because I find people that are only truth people, they like things when everything's going the way the Bible says, and "It should be this way. Here's how people are supposed to act. Here's what people are supposed to do. Here's how marriage is supposed to look. Here's what gender is. Here's the truth about abortion. Here's the truth about all these things. And I keep my standard, that's why I love this church." And here's the thing. And when everybody rejects that, then here's the church that's truthful too. Mercy's extended to you and we still love you. Nothing's changed about God's love for you. He still cares for you even though you haven't kept his standard. And both are equally true. That's the gospel.

And here's why that's worthy of celebrating. We're uncomfortable with that because we're like in church, "No, we should be telling the truth. He needs to tell people to stop sinning." How well has that worked for you? Yes, we hold the truth up high. Yes, we hold the standard. Yes, we call you to be perfect like Jesus is perfect. And yes, we understand you can't do it apart from Christ and you won't do it. I've never had a day in my life in 51 years where I went to bed at night and said, "I nailed it today. Got it. I can't think of one thing, one thought, one attitude, one behavior that I could change. I mean, I think I'm there." Never has happened. Never will happen.

And so while we're truthful people and we center our lives on the authority of God's word, let's also be grace-filled people. What you see in Jericho is God's truth and justice coming forward and his mercy to those who wanted him. That's always what it is. Jesus Christ is bearing patiently with this world because he wants all to come to a knowledge of him. He would love all to repent and know him. And yes, he will bring justice. And yes, he will bring it swiftly. He will. Which is why God calls us to turn to him in repentance. Because right now his mercy is available and it's lavish for anyone who's fallen short of the glory of God and recognizes their need for a Lord and savior. Amen?

Amen.

I mean, we should celebrate that. Nobody's getting into heaven because they kept all the truth. The way we're getting into heaven is because of the mercy of our gracious heavenly Father who sent his son to die for all of our sin. Amen?

Amen.

So when we see justice and mercy triumph together, that's when we celebrate. When somebody murders somebody and they are sentenced to die and we say, "That's justice. That's right," we should also be saying, "How are we going to get the gospel to that person too?" Because that's mercy. When we raise a standard and say abortion's wrong. That's correct. It is. And then how do we raise the standard of mercy and say, "Hey, for those of you that have struggled with that or chosen that way or are still wrestling with how you're going to bring a child into the world where you're all by

yourself," how do we show mercy to that too? I mean, both are equally true. It's not one or the other. It's both end. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can handle full truth and full mercy. And we need to celebrate in our culture and in our lives when we see that.

Amen?

Amen.

I mean, by faith, Rahab the harlot. I mean the poor girl. I mean, yeah, she was a prostitute once upon a time, but she gave her life to the living God. And yet all throughout scripture for thousands of years later, how is she known? Only by her sin. Only by what she was. I don't think it's in there because that's how God sees her. I think it's in there so that we'll see how people see her. And that God can choose that, the shameful things of the world to confound the wise.

Amen.

That Rahab the prostitute, she didn't die with those who are disobedient because she welcomed the spies in peace. She welcomed God's plan. She did that. We need to celebrate God when justice and mercy triumph together. We also need to do this. This is my favorite. We need to celebrate God when unique, broken, unlikely people are faithful.

I had a lot of words there. I only picked three. But we need to celebrate God when unique, broken, unlikely people are faithful. What other kind of people does God have to choose? Unique, broken, and unlikely. That's his only choice. Now think about this. You're unique, okay? Psalm 1:39 says, "You're fearfully and wonderfully made."

You were in it together in your mother's womb. Your soul knows it full well. All your strengths, all your gifts, all your DNA, your looks, your height, everything about you was given to you by God. All your strengths, all your weaknesses, which means only you can be you and you're in this generation living the way God wants you because he's got purpose in your life that's unique to you. I hear too many people say, "I want to be the next..." and they fill in the blank. You could never be the next anybody, no matter how hard you try. You can only be, the fullness by faith, what God created you to be. You can never be anybody else.

And yes, there may be people you look to in your life who are leaders or have gone before you that you say, "I want to live a life of faith like them. That's great." But you will never fulfill what they fulfilled. You're unique. Let me tell you number two. You're broken. All of sin have fallen short of the glory of God. God only chooses broken people because that's the only choice that he has. In church, we try to cover up our brokenness. We try to pretend like we're a lot better now. We like to put on makeup. We like to cover up our sin. The longer we've been a Christian, the more scriptures we can put on it and pretend that we're further down the road than we actually are. But the reality is, no matter how far we are down the road with Christ, we're still not perfect. Only Jesus is.

Amen.

That's a fact. So if God's going to use you, the lie of the enemy is, "Get yourself right." The lie of the enemy is, "Hey, you can't come to Christ until you get yourself right. You better fix yourself." That's the lie of the enemy to the nonbeliever. To the

believer, it's this. "Yeah, you came to Christ, but he can't use you till you fix all your garbage that you had when you came to Christ." That's a lie too. You come to Christ and then you let God start working all the stuff out as you're coming to Christ, because you're broken and you'll always be broken. "I'm not one of those broken. Church is just like a crutch for those broken people."

Listen, if you have four flat tires or one flat tire, you can't get home today after church. I don't care how little broken you think you are or how a lot broken. You're broken. You can't function the way God wants you to function the way you are. You're all broken. That means look around this room because there's this false thing that happens in church where couples all sit with their arms around each other and their kids sit smiling down the row and you're with all your friends and you falsely think, "Am I the only one at church with problems?" Shout the answer for me please.

No.

No. We're all broken. We're all broken. There's just certain seasons that doesn't seem as broken as others. But God always is reminding us of our brokenness. You're unique. You're broken. And guess what you are? You're unlikely. Like, why would God use you? Why would God choose the people he chose? He chooses unlikely people. And so often when we think, "Well, if God's going to use me, I guess I got to go to seminary and be a pastor." God doesn't only use pastors. God uses kings. God uses warriors. God uses soldiers. God uses farmers. God uses business people. God uses housewives. God uses single people. God uses married people. God uses whatever

you are if you'll take a step of faith with him.

Amen.

That's who he's looking for. And he'll use you in unlikely ways. So notice what the text says. He starts summing up the entire Old Testament, whoever the author of Hebrews is, and starts talking about it. "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?" I mean, think about these guys. I mean God use unique, broken, unlikely people. I mean, when I read about Gideon in Judges 7, I mean here's how God called him to lead. He came to him and said, "Mighty warrior." I mean, if you study the life of Gideon, Gideon was a coward and a wimp. And it's the angel of the Lord says, "Hey, mighty warrior." "What are you talking about? I got to army of 32,000 people. I guess I am." "Yeah, I want you to trim it to 10,000. And now that you got it down to 10,000, let's make it 300." The original 300 movie is in Judges 7.

And why did he trim it to 300? So that when they went out and fought their enemy that outnumbered the grains of sand and they won, who was the one that was going to be celebrated and who would be the one that would get the glory? God. If he would've picked a mighty warrior and he would've gone out and kicked tail and opened up a can and done all this, then that person would get glory. God chose that which was foolish in the eyes of the world, a young little coward to drive away an army so that Israel would say, "Our God's awesome because if he can use Gideon, he can use anybody." That's the story of Gideon.

Or what about Barak? I mean, Deborah the prophetess summoned him. And he went with her and routed Sisera. But he really wasn't known for taking the lead. He was like, "I'll go, but you got to go with me." Or what about Samson? I mean, if you took Judges 13 through 16 and Hollywood just spelled it out without editing, it would not even get it rated R rating. I mean, Samson is not known so much for his deliverance of Israel, although he was used for that. He was no much more for indulging in sin, wasn't he? I mean, if we study the life of Samson, you wouldn't be like, "I want my kid to grow up and be like Samson." You wouldn't say that.

Or what about Jephthah who was an overzealous, mighty warrior who made a vow to God? In Judges 11, he's like, "Lord, I want to live for you. And I tell you what, I'm so for you that if you give me the victory, whatever comes out of my house when I get home, I will sacrifice that to you." Thinking it was going to be an animal. And who came out of his front door when he came home after victory? His oldest daughter. The scripture seems to say he followed his vow. That doesn't sound very good. What's he doing in the hall of faith if he killed his eldest daughter because of a vow he made to God?

Or David, the man after God's own heart. Man, did David ever do anything wrong? He was the man after God's own heart. He wrote a lot of the Psalms. He was a worship leader. What a wonderful guy. He slayed Goliath. He's a man after God's own heart. I cannot wait to meet David when I get to heaven. Until he saw Bathsheba bathing, summoned her in, had bad relations with her, got her pregnant and then had her husband killed. So he's known for his immorality and murder.

Samuel was the last judge, really the first prophet. We see great things in his life. But if you study the life of his sons, he wasn't a great dad to them. I mean, who are you going to read about in the Bible that was good other than Jesus? Can you think about any character? I mean, is there anyone in your Old or New Testament that you would say, "I just want to be just like them." God only had unique, broken, unlikely people that he could work his life through. We have the false idea in 2022 in Denver, Colorado that in order to be used by God, we got to be perfect. Or we're not perfect, we know that, but we didn't sin the big sins in our past. Friends, nothing in your past prohibits you from what God has for your future. Which means this, God's not done with your life until God says he's done with your life.

Amen.

The enemy lies to you and tells you that because of your past you have no future with God. But your past was secured by Jesus through his death in the cross, and so is your future.

Amen.

It's the shed blood of Christ and his resurrection from the dead that qualifies you. And what makes all these people qualified in the Bible? It wasn't that they follow the normal pattern. I mean, in my vocation, as a pastor I see this happen all the time. We have a hard time celebrating God when unique, broken, unlikely, people are faithful in the ministry. We tend to gang up on them. Like, "What's God using them for? How come they got a big congregation? They didn't go to seminary where I went to. I don't

even know if they know the word that well. How come they're getting... How come..." Because we're upset that God's using some unlikely person to do great things. Can we not celebrate them?

I mean, if Twitter accounts on social media would've been prevalent in the Old and New Testament, you wouldn't follow any of these people. None of them. You would write article upon article upon article about why they should be removed and God should never use them anymore. Praise God he doesn't listen to social media. Praise God he's got a design and plan for each one of our lives. Amen?

Amen.

I mean, I love reading through this because when I read through this and I've read through Hebrews 11 over and over as I've been preaching it, you think about all the different characters and I'm thinking to myself, "Whose life would I actually want to model after?" I mean, whose life would I want? I mean, I wouldn't want to be Noah because you spend 120 years building an ark and preaching and nobody listens to you for 120 years. And then your reward is getting in a boat with every animal on the earth for a year. I don't want that life. I don't want Moses' life where every day the back half of your life, 2 million people complain about everything you're doing when you're just trying to follow God. I mean, can you look at anybody's life and you're like, "I want to be them." There's not one person I read about that I want to be other than Jesus.

I mean, this is what you need to get really deep down in your gut because too often in church, you get that false lie in your head that the only way you can serve God

is in a church building as a pastor or a worship leader. Or if you're called and you like to play music and write songs or you like to speak. Other than that, God couldn't really use anybody like that. And yet all throughout the Old and New Testament, God chooses unlikely people to do incredible things for him.

I mean think about Rahab. Rahab the prostitute. She's the great, great, great grandmother of King David. She's in the genealogical line of the Lord Jesus Christ. How awesome is that?

Amen.

I mean, think about this. I was writing some of these down. I've seen some of these on the internet before, but you just need to get this deep down in your soul. That God's not done with you until he says he's done with you. And quit listening to what other people say about why you're disqualified. You're only disqualified when God says that you are. God always uses repentance as a way of bringing people back through his mercy and grace, not his standard.

I mean think about these people. Noah got drunk. Abraham was too old, he lied about his wife being his sister. Isaac was a daydreamer. Jacob was a trickster and a deceiver. Leah was ugly. Can you imagine if the Holy Spirit said that about you? I mean, that's what the Bible said. God still used her. Joseph was arrogant, dancing around in his robe. He was abused. Moses was a murderer and angry and couldn't speak very well. Gideon was afraid. Samson was immoral and afraid. Rahab was a prostitute. Jeremiah and Timothy were considered too young. David was a murderer

and adulterer. Elijah was suicidal. Jonah ran from God. Naomi was a widow. Joab lost his family and went bankrupt. John the Baptist ate bugs and people thought he was crazy. Peter denied Christ. The disciples fell asleep while praying in the garden. Martha worried about everything. Mary Magdalene was demon possessed. The Samaritan woman was divorced multiple times. Zacchaeus was too short. Paul was a murderer. Timothy had an ulcer. And Lazarus was dead.

I mean, what's your problem? God only chooses people who are unique, broken and unlikely. That's why he put things in your heart. Because God wants to do something through you. It's only people that are telling you God can't use you. God hasn't told you that.

Amen.

Your voice and what you hear from God has to be way louder than what other people say. Because if you listen to other people, they have a plan and they have a formula. And they think, "It needs to go like this in order for God." And yeah, God gives us counselors. Even to our best ability, our counselors are trying to help, but at the end of the day, God's voice is way more important than what anybody else tells you.

Do you celebrate God when you see his justice and mercy being put on display? Do you celebrate God when you see him work his life through somebody that's unlikely? Somebody that's broken? Somebody that's unique? That does it differently than you would've ever done it. I mean, we read these stories. I mean, they did some great things. They conquered kingdoms. We read about angels coming down. One

angel coming down and slaying 185,000 of Syrians in one night. They performed acts of righteousness and obtained promises.

I mean Daniel shut the mouth of lions when he was thrown into the lions' den, quenched the power of fire. We know the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They escaped the edge of the sword. From weakness like Gideon they were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. You remember Elijah and the widow of Zarephath or Elijah and the Shunammite woman. I mean we see God do amazing things through unlikely people. And we falsely get this idea in our head, "Those people were really awesome." Those people were as human as you are. And that's what the author's trying to tell. These Jewish converts are looking to turn back saying, "Hey, by faith, if they endured, how much more now having the Holy Spirit in your life can you endure too?" It's totally worth it. He said, "You go for it."

Now, if we can understand that God's justice and mercy is being celebrated and we can understand how God uses unique, broken, unlikely people, then we also need to understand this. And this is a place I want to pause just a little bit. Because one thing we need to celebrate God for is when his faithful endure wicked treatment. When his faithful endure wicked treatment. Now, why is this so important? It's important because it's in the word of God. And it's really interesting because all throughout this chapter of faith, what do we hear? "Take a step of faith. If you take a step of faith, God will bless it. And if you take a step of faith and God blesses it, he'll do incredible things in and through you."

And all of that is true. But unfortunately, especially as Americans, we think here's what that means. "God is writing a success story through me. And if I partner with him, everything in my life is going to be super successful. And not everything may be successful, but certainly my faith journey will. Everybody will know that I partnered with the Lord and it all went just the way it was supposed to go." Until you get to this section of scripture. And it's all throughout, because suffering's a part of the Christian experience. It talks about some others. They're not mentioned by name.

Most of God's great saints are anonymous by the way. Did you know that? Don't live for your name in this world. Nobody's going to remember it anyway.

Amen.

It's anonymous saints that God has always used. Notice this. "And others were tortured. Not accepting their release that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others experience mockings," that's verbal abuse, "And scourings," that's physical abuse. Yes. Also chains and imprisonment. What else were they? Well, "They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were tempted. They were put to death with the sword. They went around in sheepskins and goatskins being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated."

Now what do you think of when you hear that? I think as Americans sometimes we think, "Ah, that's unfortunate for those 30 people that happen to." Do you know there's more martyrdom happening in our world today than in any other time in world history? That there are people in Iran right now on trial for their life simply for sharing

their faith. There are people in the Sudan being put to death regularly just for sharing their faith. If you come to Christ in certain parts of the world, you'll be disowned from your family, beaten and forced to recant your faith. Maybe even killed if you don't. We don't deal with that stuff here yet. We don't. We can go out and share faith pretty much anywhere. And yeah, we might get some verbal abuse, and yeah, we might have people tell us to shut up, but nobody's going to throw you in jail for sharing that you're a Christian, yet.

But the day is coming. I told you, 2020 changed me. When I was getting ready to preach on a Sunday and having to pray with my wife wondering if I was going to get arrested and what the protocols were going to be, when that happened in the United States of America I said, "The day is coming." It's coming. And why do we pause here? Because so often we think that faithfulness is God's obligation to give us success in this world. Now, faithfulness gives God a chance to work through you, to tell a story through you to this world that can only be told the way he wants it told.

So whether you become King Solomon or whether you become like Stephen who preaches the gospel once and gets stoned to death, God's going to use all of that for his glory. And by the way, you don't get to choose the story. God does, because God's the one that made you. Because so often we're like, "Okay, God, here's the deal. I will follow you. But I need to know who my husband is or who my wife is or where we're going to go or how much money we're going to make or what the outcome's going to be or how we're going to be able to pay for it and how we're going to be able to do all this. And Lord, if you just show me all that, I will follow you." And

here's what God says, "I'm not showing you anything. I'm going to show you myself. And if you love me and take steps towards me, I will do something in and through your life that can only be accomplished in and through you for all eternity."

Some of the greatest saints that have ever lived are anonymous saints. Some of the people that you're going to meet in heaven that are going to sit closest to the glory of God will be unknowns here on this earth. Being people that have prayed, people that have been persecuted, being people that have been put in boxes and thrown into the water and drowned, people that have been beaten to death with sticks. People that have endured and been told, "Hey, if you recant your faith, we'll let you live" and they're like, "You can kill me because I believe in Jesus." I mean it happens all the time. I think we pause here as Americans to hear this to say, this is real. It's always been real in every generation. And if you don't believe it, the reason you're here today hearing the gospel is because the first apostles, with the exception of John, all gave their life for the cause of Christ. They all shed their blood.

Giving of your life to your death has always been the call. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. In other words, if you're going all in with me, you don't get to choose your future. I do. Would you be willing to go to your death for me? That's all I'm asking. If you give me everything, I will work something through you that's incredible. But you don't get to choose your story and you don't get to choose the outcome." And that's the beauty of the gospel.

And I find in my story and in everybody's story that oftentimes it's not what we

want. Have you noticed that? I can assure you when I grew up, I did not set out to be a pastor. I can assure you none of my Sunday schools pointed me out and said, "That will be a great pastor." I can assure you if you knew me in college, nobody would've pointed me out and said, "That guy's going to be a pastor," right? I mean, I just know that. So I listen to young guys. And I'm not saying if you want to be a pastor, you shouldn't be a pastor. I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that wasn't what I wanted. But I know the closer I got to God and what he was showing me, he's directed every step and I'm willing to do whatever he wants until I meet him face to face. Because I want to give my life for him. And I yearn to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

But you know what that means? That means if you're a mechanic, it means if you're a coach, it means if you're a stay-at-home mom, it means if you're a working mom, it means if whatever it is that you do, God can use you right now for certain things he can only do through you because you have a sphere of influence that nobody else on the planet earth has.

Amen.

And all he's looking to do is say, "Hey, will you be faithful to me? Will you keep taking steps towards me?" See, so many of us in America, we want to have a successful life. We want to know that we've made enough money and we've accumulated enough stuff and we've loved our family well enough that we've got to hand it all off and we've done it in a way where most people can look at our life and

say, "Man, they covered up their brokenness really well. That person has a good family. They have a good church life. They have a good this. They have a good that." You unpack the curtain and you realize nobody's perfect. You go behind the curtain, you realize that everybody's got struggles and everybody's got challenges just like you do. It's, will you keep enduring and will you keep stepping. The question is this, are you going to live for this earth or are you going to live for the coming kingdom? And it's your choice. It's your choice.

I can tell you that the coming kingdom is far greater. The coming kingdom is far greater. Few people find the path of faithfulness and trust that God can use them. But when you read stories of missionaries, when you read stories of leaders, God uses them. I mean, D.L. Moody, one of the greatest evangelists of all time, you know what he did? He sold shoes. Shoe salesman. God can use shoe salesman too. God uses everybody if they're willing to give their lives completely to him.

Notice what he goes on to say, "His faithful endure wicked treatment." Will you celebrate God when you see his faithful endure wicked treatment? Because here's what I see. Even when we see other people that are Christians in our Christian community today endure wicked treatment or get falsely treated, we stand with them from a distance. "I'm glad they're standing up for what's true. That's so awesome they're doing that. I'll pray for them." But oftentimes we don't go public and say, "I'm standing with them right next to them because what they're doing is right. And what everybody else is doing around them is wicked. And if they're going to punish them, punish me too."

Amen.

We don't like to do that. We don't like to celebrate God and celebrate what he's doing when we see faithful people that are punished because of the wicked. For us, many times when we hear about the persecuted church, it's one Sunday a month, we take a special offering and send it, "Hey, hope they feel better. We'll pray for them today." We don't like to think about that. It's too consuming for us. It's too difficult for us to think that that's somebody's dad in jail getting beat. That's somebody's kid in jail getting beat. That's somebody that's just believing what we believe and they're being mistreated and we say, "Well, that's another country. That's another group of people." They're our brothers and sisters in Christ. They're our family, right? We can't stand on the sidelines and be faithful, right? We get involved when God does that.

And then finally we do this. We celebrate God when focusing on our future together with Christ. We celebrate God when focusing on our future together with Christ. Notice what he says. He says, "And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised." All these what? All these people you're reading about in Hebrews 11, all the people that have lived faithful, what did they not... They gained approval. God was saying, "Well done. You did it," but what didn't they get? They did not receive what was promised. Well, what was promised in the Old Testament? The coming Messiah.

They never got to see the coming Messiah. They were yearning for the coming Messiah. But I think this text even means more than this, that nobody on this side of

heaven will ever experience the fullness of all the God's promised. Because the greatest gifts that God has promised are coming to us in his coming kingdom. We're not called to live completely for this world. We're called to live in this world and be in the world, but not be of the world. In other words, it's wrong to think that if I'm in this world, I'm living for this world, that everything's going to go my way and I'm going to be a blessing to God. Maybe.

Maybe you're going to live for God and God's going to make you super wealthy. Fantastic. Use it for his glory. Maybe God's going to give you a lot of influence with people. Use it for his glory. Maybe God's going to use you as a martyr. Use it for his glory. Maybe God's going to make your family a living hell on earth. Use it for his glory. Maybe God's going to keep you single and you always wanted to get married. Use it for his glory. Maybe God's going to make you married and you're going to wish you were single. Use it for his glory. Right?

I mean all of us have things in our life that we would change if we could change, but oftentimes those are the things that God's trying to grow us through so we'll have compassion for other people. Because what's coming is better. And if everything on this life was perfect, you wouldn't yearn for the life to come.

Amen.

But when you press into Jesus, you'll realize real quickly, "There's a lot of brokenness around here. I'm not the only broken one. Everybody else is broken too. Come Lord Jesus, put this thing back together." And when we yearn for that, that's

what's coming. Because think about this, because God has provided something better for us so that apart from us, they would not be made perfect. When are things going to be made perfect? When we're all together with Jesus. Not just me being perfected in the presence of Jesus, not just you being perfected in the presence of Jesus, but all of us being perfected in the presence of Jesus. That's when it's going to be incredible.

And it's not going to be us getting to heaven saying, "Oh, I can't wait to meet Moses." You'll meet him. "Oh, I can't wait to meet Jonah." You'll meet him. But I don't know that it's going to be all that exciting. But when you meet Jesus face to face, it's going to be exciting. And when you see how Jesus has redeemed all of humanity that's responded to him, it's going to be exciting. And what's coming in the coming kingdom is greater than anything we'll ever experience in this world. That's why God is saying for time and space, "Would you please plug into me and let me tell my story through you." And whether it's for another five minutes or 50 years, will you live for me all the way to the finish line? Because I want to do something in and through you that I destined for you to touch the world that nobody else can touch the world with." That's all he's saying. Which means this, every single one of you should be able to celebrate God's faithfulness to you and celebrate God's faithfulness through you.

He's no respecter of persons. You will not get to heaven and say, "Well, I would've liked to live for you, but I didn't have much." He gave you everything you ever need for him to tell his story through you. I mean too many of us lived for this world. I know I did for a long time even as a believer and had all these plans for what God could do for me. And if he did it for me, then I would know that he was blessing my life.

And I falsely believed this understanding of God's blessing as doing everything that I wanted versus God's blessing giving me the things I need to accomplish what he wanted.

I remember playing football at the University of Illinois and I was given this poem. This poem is something I pretty much have memorized, but it did a lot for me because I always thought God was going to use me in athletics to draw people to him. And if God would just do these things for me, then I would be his spokesperson. In case you didn't know, that didn't work out that way.

But I remember reading this poem as a young guy in college and it says this, it says, "Your name may not appear down here in this world's hall of fame. In fact, you may be so unknown that no one knows your name. The Oscars here may pass you by and neon lights of blue. But if you love and serve the Lord, then I have news for you. This hall of fame is only good as long as time shall be. But keep in mind, God's hall of fame is for eternity. To have your name inscribed up there is greater yet by far than all the halls of fame down here and every manmade star. This crowd on earth will soon forget the heroes of the past. They'll cheer like mad until you're gone, and that's how long you'll last. But God, he never does forget. And in his hall of fame, by just believing in his son, inscribed you'll find your name."

Amen.

"I tell you friend, I wouldn't trade my name however small that's written there beyond the walls in that celestial hall. For any famous name on earth or glory that they

share, I'd rather be an unknown here and have my name up there." Amen?

Amen.

God wants to use you for his story of greatness. He purposed you in this generation with who you are, with all your strengths and all your weaknesses for him to accomplish something unique in and through you. Even if you don't know what that is and you're pressing into God, he'll still get it done. That's who our God is. He loves you with an unconditional love and he wants you to serve him with everything that you have.

Amen?

Amen. Would you stand with me as we seek the Lord together. Father in heaven, I just pray today that we would be reminded of your truth and mercy that took place at the cross 2,000 years ago, Lord. That you died on the cross. That you settled it once and for all that sin was taken care of. And at the same time, you poured out mercy to anyone who would come running to you.

If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus as your personal Lord and savior, you can simply tell the Lord, "Lord, I know I'm broken and a sinner and I need you. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Be my Lord and savior." And Lord for all of us who are here, I pray that your Holy Spirit would drive home the word that you gave today. That everyone here in Christ would know that you are doing awesome things in and through them despite the lies they hear in their head. And Lord, that they would walk every day with you. God, for what you're doing and for what you're going to do in each and every one of our

lives, we give you all the glory and all the honor and all the praise. In Jesus name.

Amen and amen.

Amen.

Can we give God praise?