

Induction into God's Hall of Faith Fame

Our New Testament Scripture is Hebrews 11:32-40. The writer, who was also a pastor, urged these new Christians, converted from Judaism and undergoing persecution, to remain true to Christ, even as did these believers within the Old Covenant of Judaism, some of whom were persecuted and even martyred for their faith. He wrote that these first century followers of Jesus Christ had the opportunity to join saints of old in God's Hall of Faith Fame.

Follow as I read Hebrews 11: 32-40

³² And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Hebrews 11 tells us that God has a Hall of Faith-Fame, and there is still room for additional inductees. There are halls of fame I don't even know about, much less have any hope for induction! In Canton, Ohio I visited the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and always intended to visit the College Football Hall of Fame near Cincinnati. Some of you, perhaps, have visited the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, or perhaps, in my estimation the nobler hall of fame for teachers, in Emporia, Kansas. There is also the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, Ohio, the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York, not to mention halls of fame for music, theater and many other disciplines. And there are numerous American Olympic performers we've seen this week who will no doubt be in halls of fame for swimming, gymnastics and other sports as well.

Each one of these halls of fame has certain criteria for selection and induction, and probably a panel of judges that determines who meets these criteria. God is the sole judge of his Hall of Faith Fame. He has his criteria by which he will determine his inductees, who have distinguished themselves by simple but

profound faith. As is true by the listing in Hebrews 11, these examples include the well-known and the anonymous, the famous and the obscure.

The mother of Zebedee's sons wanted them to be, as it were, inducted into God's Hall of Faith Fame, and Jesus assured James and John they would share his cup of suffering, but that the Father would give special place to those he has been preparing for such. Certainly the criteria for exceptional heavenly honor and glory, in addition to grace, will be faith and faithfulness.

Our scripture, as a summary epilogue, mentions some criteria for being inducted into God's Hall of Faith Fame. This chapter has listed some heroes of the past, but implies there are inductees even today, and those whose names are yet to be mentioned. The following chapter (12) makes the transition to today, saying that we're surrounded by these great heroes of yesterday as our witnesses and examples, so let us *now* get in the "race of faith," and get inducted into God's Hall of Fame prepared for the faithful.

Faith heroes are conquerors, doing effective Kingdom work (32-35a). They do so by faith in God's power. Early in this chapter are the words, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" (3). By faith we believe in God's power to create this amazing universe out of nothing, and we also by faith believe he has the power to transform and enable our lives. Our text tells us how these heroes of faith brought to God's service nothing but their weakness, and "became mighty in war," and "put foreign armies to flight." (34). They relied on the power of God to deliver them from the Enemy. As followers of Jesus, we must, to be heroes of faith, trust his creation power and also the power of the cross and the power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:19f).

These Old Covenant heroes of the faith lived before the time of the fulfillment of the promises in Christ Jesus (39). These heroes all had received grace to believe in the pre-incarnate Christ, and knew that the same power that saved them would work through them. They knew that the God who delivered them from sin, Satan, and destruction, would be their source of grace and power against all odds (Rom. 8: 31-35). These heroes had grace to enable them to stand faithful, even under the pressure of horrible suffering.

The Apostle Paul says, by living in dependence on the Holy Spirit within us, we become more than conquerors, i.e. "superheroes" in God's Hall of Faith-Fame (Rom. 8:37). That doesn't mean we're heroic in the eyes of others, or that we're regarded as exceptional human beings. God seems to delight in using ordinary folks, people that make it into no one else's hall of fame. This is in order that God's power and wisdom can be seen more clearly, and so everyone knows it's his power working and not human ability, as Paul explains in this *The Message* paraphrase:

“Take a look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don’t see many of ‘the brightest and the best’ among you, not many of the influential, not many from high-society families. Isn’t it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these ‘nobodies’ to expose the hollow pretensions of the ‘somebodies’? That makes it quite clear that none of you gets by with blowing your own horn before God. Everything we have—right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start—comes from God by way of Jesus Christ. That’s why we have the saying, ‘If you’re going to blow a horn, blow a trumpet for God’” (1 Cor. 1: 26-31).

God doesn’t need this world’s hall of famers to be his Hall of Faith-Famers. In fact, each of these heroes mentioned in verse 32 had one very evident character flaw or had experienced a major lapse of faith. God’s heroes of faith please and honor him, regardless of past sins and failures.

Baseball Hall of Famer Mickey Mantle, shortly before his death, held a press conference to confess he had made a wreck of his life through alcoholism, and had forfeited his right to be a role model to young people. Even so, he’s in the Hall. And by his grace, God forgives and even uses us sinners in a life of faith.

As John Calvin commented on this list of heroes in verse 32, he noted that everyone God uses has something reprehensible about his/her life. You may think you’ve blown it, and because of a past sin or mistake, can’t serve God. Gideon was a semi-pagan; Barak needed to be propped up and encouraged by Deborah; Samson certainly was no role model for marriage, and Jephthah made a foolish vow that condemned his own daughter to death. King David committed the egregious murder plot to cover for his adultery, and even wise old Samuel was guilty of errors of judgment. But God was willing, and still by the same grace is willing and able to use us, regardless of our past.

As with these heroes, God is calling each one of us to join him in what he alone can do in and through our lives. Our old habits, sins, and temptations can be conquered by his power. The spiritual growth and effective witness, service, and ministry he has called us to do can be done in the power of God alone.

A bunch of “no-names” (32) conquered enemies, escaped danger, and were even resuscitated back to life. This latter group experienced severe suffering and even martyrdom in their obedience and loyalty to Christ. Perhaps they felt powerless in the face of adversity, but they never doubted the presence of God. These homeless pilgrims decided living for God and his kingdom was a better choice than going along with the ways of a fallen world.

These no-name heroes were of great worth to God. The fallen world was not worthy of them (38). There is the truth that God’s people adorn and enrich the world as “salt, light and leaven” in a way of which the unbelieving world is not worthy. The world is not worthy of those who suffered and died for the truth of

the gospel and social justice, which has changed countless lives and cultures throughout history.

In our text we read about heroes of faith who had grace to overcome, even to remain faithful through times of personal tragedy, illness and suffering. As Kent Hughes says, the church today needs a "survival doctrine," because we're facing increasingly the threat of overt persecution from a pagan culture that is becoming intolerant of our "intolerant" convictions. Hughes says there's no prosperity gospel in this text, and we should deplore the wishful thinking that the church will not have to sail through the bloody seas of the Great Tribulation.

My heroes throughout my ministry haven't been the big "movers and shakers" but rather have been those who remained faithful to God during trials, tragedies and disappointment, such as the illness and death of a child, or some other tragedy. As someone has aptly said, it takes more faith to endure than to escape (W Wiersbe). Faith turns suffering into a meaningful experience with the grace of God.

Faith in God's promise is a criterion for induction into God's Hall of Faith Fame. These ancients pleased God with faith even though they had not yet received the promise. If these in the Old Covenant so believed before Christ's incarnation, how much more should we who know the story of Jesus? If they who had only a spark of light to lead them found their way to heaven, how much greater should be our motivation, faithfulness, and assurance, now that we have the full light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6)?

I need to be reminded of God's promises to me that have come out of a relationship with him. All the heroes of faith were people who believed God had a specific purpose to fulfill, even when the odds seemed stacked against them. I'm still trusting God to make me into a godly man, with a loving heart. I'm trusting God to make me a more usable instrument in his hands. And, we must believe in those promises that will not be fulfilled during this mortal pilgrimage of faith. Like Abraham, who never saw in his lifetime the great nation that had been promised, or Moses, who never got to enter the Promised Land, we too must live by that same indomitable faith in God's promises of a glorious everlasting future. We must believe in the promise of seeing and being with a glorified Savior, and being made fully and finally perfect in his likeness.

I believe there may be, as it was for these ancient heroes of faith, promises undelivered in this life (39). Perhaps it will be through your spiritual offspring that the vision God has given you for your life will be fulfilled. One of the heroes mentioned in our text is David (32). Great as he was, he was not allowed to see the fulfillment of the desire of his heart to build a great temple, a dwelling place for the Lord. God's promise of a temple and a great kingdom was fulfilled after his death through his son, Solomon.

God is still at work making heroes of faith. We always depend on grace, and we never can deserve God's grace, love, and salvation. As Jerry Bridges says, we must continue to preach the gospel to ourselves, and depend on grace to grow in godliness and holiness. Without His amazing grace, we're unprepared for life and death, much less for his Hall of Faith Fame.

This Hall of Fame is not for an elite few, but for all who want to be God's heroes. We're not talking about having to be a natural-born leader, or a biblical scholar, or learned theologian. We're not even talking about having to be a church leader, with an outgoing personality and a hero's disposition. If we want to know and love and live for God, we'll be inducted.

Teachers, athletes, and aviators are inducted into their halls of fame, sometime after retirement, just like Brett Favre was last weekend in Canton, Ohio. In God's Hall of Fame, you can do your best living and serving, right up to the moment he sends Gabriel to get you, or when he comes on the clouds of glory. Then the Hall of Faith-Fame will be the glory we share with him forever.

The athletes we've seen perform in the Olympics seem to have an extra "something" that allows them to perform at a championship level, whether it indomitable confidence, courage or inspiration. But you and I have all we need, Christ himself and his Spirit, to enable us to be in God's Hall of Faith Fame.

William Jones, an African American preacher, who in the 1980 meeting of the Baptist World Alliance, preached to believers around the world facing persecution. He quoted an African-American gospel song written by Lucie Campbell that says it all:

*Preachers and teachers would make their appeal,
Fighting as soldiers on great battlefields;
When to their pleadings, my poor heart did yield,
All I could say, there is something within.*

*Something within me that holdeth the reigns,
Something within me that banishes pain;
Something within me I cannot explain,
All that I know there is something within.*

*Have you that something, that burning desire?
Have you that something that never doth tire?
Oh, if you have it, that Heavenly fire;
Then let the world know there is something within.*

