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Growing Our Faith
“Faith That Perseveres”
(Part 5)

Intro:

People just love Heb. 11 and all the victories that came with these people’s faith. This is why they like to stop reading before they get to these verses.

Heb. 11:35-39 “But others trusted God and were tortured, preferring to die rather than turn from God and be free. They placed their hope in the resurrection to a better life. Some were mocked, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in dungeons. Some died by stoning, and some were sawn in half; others were killed with the sword. Some went about in skins of sheep and goats, hungry and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world...All these people we have mentioned received God’s approval because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.” (NLT)

These people had a faith that persevered no matter what happened to them!

- How do we develop a faith that perseveres? We are going to need this kind of faith to accomplish all that God is calling us to. The journey ahead is not for the faint of heart.

I. Maintain An Eternal Perspective

“They placed their hope in the resurrection to a better life.” They saw beyond merely this life. 3 attitudes to this eternal perspective we must have.

A. This life is not all there is

John 14:2 “There are many rooms in My Father’s home, and I am going to prepare a place for you.” (NLT) Heaven / eternity / forever is real!!!

1. We must not lose sight of the fact that this life is temporary and it is the next life that lasts forever. Why is this mindset so important?
2. Because if you lose sight of eternity, (your destination) you can’t persevere. It’s a lot like the pioneers on the Oregon trail. What made them persevere the hardships of months of travel with the odds that someone in their party would surely die? It was the hope of the destination.
3. Too many Christians today live as if heaven doesn’t exist. They live as if this life is all there is and they’d better grab as much of it as they can. They place their hope in the things of this life instead of what waits for them at the end of the journey.

4. Why should I endure hardship if I'm not motivated by the destination? What's the point? In order to have a faith that endures, I must remember where I'm going is eternal and that the hardships of this life are temporary.

II Cor. 4:18 "So, we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever." (NLT)

B. How I live this life affects the next

Matt. 5:11-12 "God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are My followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven." (NLT)

1. All through scripture, God has an incentive program called rewards. Now, some rewards we experience in this life. We call those blessings. But God also wants us to realize that most of our rewards are experienced in eternity.
2. God wants us to know that how we live this temporary life impacts my eternal life. That based upon my obedience to Him in this life, I am actually accumulating eternal rewards in heaven.
3. My relationship with Jesus and my eternal destination is based completely on faith in Christ. BUT, my rewards in eternity are based upon works...or obedience.
4. What's the motivation for enduring hardship for Christ if there is no reward for it? If in eternity, the person who lived for God and the person who lived for the world are the same? Where is the justice and fairness of God?
5. How we live our lives right now is determining what we experience in eternity. Not determining destination, but it is going to impact and affect certain dynamics in heaven.
6. We will not all be the same in heaven. WHY? Because we will not all be rewarded the same in heaven. There is a rewards ceremony awaiting us in the future. It's called the Bema seat of Christ. (judgment seat) –explain
7. If we lose this eternal perspective, it's pretty tough to persevere. The reward at the end helps me persevere in the present. Why should I sacrifice financially in this life? Because Jesus said we are investing in eternity! "Can't take it with you but you can send it on ahead."

C. We are involved in a clash of spiritual kingdoms

I Peter 2:9 "...you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, His very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." (NLT)

1. We must never forget this truth that there are only two spiritual kingdoms...one of light and one of darkness. We've been rescued out of Satan's kingdom of darkness and placed into Jesus' Kingdom of light.

2. These two kingdoms are at war with each other and we are called to join the fight. The Bible repeatedly uses military terms to describe the believer's mindset in this world. *"Endure hardship as a good Soldiers of Christ Jesus"* *"Wear the Armor of God"* – Why is someone shooting at me?
3. Why does it use these terms? Because we are right in the middle of a spiritual battle going on! If believers don't wake up to this fact you will simply be a casualty in the war.
4. You have a spiritual enemy and he hates you. This church has a spiritual enemy and he hates us! Hardship just comes with the realities of the battlefield. It gets uncomfortable!
5. It will be impossible to have a faith that will persevere under hardship if we lose sight of the fact that we are in a war. Do you think the enemy is just going to willingly let go of this town? Of this geographic area? Of your family? Victory will only come as we fight. *"Fight the good fight of faith!"*

For us to persevere in this journey as a church, we must have and maintain an eternal perspective.

II. Embrace Delayed Gratification

*"yet none of them received **all** that God had promised."* (Say what?) They were faithful / obedient / and still didn't experience all that God promised? WHY?

A. Not all of God's promises are for this life

1 Cor. 13:12 ...all that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now." (NLT)

1. The ultimate fulfillment of everything God has said and promised is in the next life! Everything in this life is very partial...incomplete. Even the best that we experience of blessing and of intimacy with God is still partial compared to what is waiting for us in eternity.
2. If you have the expectation that you get it all in this life, how can you embrace delayed gratification? How can you have a faith that perseveres? This is why I reject the health / wealth / prosperity gospel of some TV preachers. God wants everyone immediately healthy? Wealthy?
3. We Americans have such a hard time with persevering faith because we are all cultured in immediate gratification. Then, we bring this belief into our relationship with God.
4. It's as if we all want heaven on earth and we want it now! That our relationship with God is primarily a means to make us happy. That God is supposed to remove all pain and difficulty from our lives.
5. Then when He doesn't, we get discouraged and quit. We conclude something is either wrong with us or God.

II Cor. 4:8-9 “We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don’t give up and quit...we get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going.” (NLT)

6. Problems do not indicate God’s promises are not true! They indicate the need for perseverance.

B. Not all of God’s promises are immediate

Gal. 6:9 “So don’t get tired of doing what is good. Don’t get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time.” (NLT)

1. Here’s a great verse about delayed gratification and the importance of persevering. Notice it says to not give up. That obedience does equal blessing, but it is “at the appropriate time”. What time is that? Whenever God says so.
2. A few verses before verse 9 this passage talks about principals about sowing and reaping. I believe understanding a little bit about farming helps us better apply how this spiritual principal works.
3. When a farmer plants in the spring, he doesn’t harvest in the same season. He has to wait until the fall. When we obey God, what we are doing is putting good seed into the ground of our lives. We must be committed to the planting process and be willing to wait until God brings a harvest.
4. We can also plant bad seeds into our lives. These result in a negative harvest / negative consequences. The principal works both ways.
5. People tend to expect harvest too soon. You may be trying to turn an area of your life around to God. As you start sowing good seed, you don’t see any changes / benefit / blessing – you assume it’s not working. What you have to do is keep sowing good seed. Bad seed is still coming to harvest – need to persevere and out live it – and good seed needs time to grow.
6. This is why it takes time to turn your life around. It takes time for the good seed to grow and produce blessing in your life. If you quit too soon, you will affect the harvest of blessing in your life.
7. SO, we can’t give up. Some of you may experience this when it comes to your finances. Just keep trusting God and eventually the blessing will come.

** To have a faith that perseveres, we must embrace delayed gratification.

III. Grow Through The Difficulties

“All these people we have mentioned received God’s approval because of their faith. (They had a persevering faith despite the hardships. – mockings / torture / chained / stoning / oppressed / mistreated)

- 2 key areas where God wants to grow us through difficulties in this life. They’re going to happen anyway, we might as well grow!

A. God wants to grow our faithfulness despite the circumstances

1. All these people had God's approval because they did what He wanted regardless of the consequences / regardless of the circumstances.
2. God wants to grow us to become people who are motivated more by our faith rather than by our feelings / fears. Obeying God despite the difficulties we face develops faithfulness. Faithfulness has a lot to do with consistency.
3. Will I do what God's word says regardless of the circumstances and regardless how these circumstances make me feel? Regardless of what the consequences might be. (positive or negative)
4. Ever faced this dilemma? Maybe you're facing it right now? Faithfulness is developed when we consistently obey what God's word says
5. Many Christians don't ever develop faithfulness because their faith is based upon the situation rather than what Scripture says. It's based upon convenience instead of conviction. Faithfulness is seldom convenient!
5. God doesn't create difficult circumstances / hardships. These come all by themselves. They come from living in a fallen world / they come from a spiritual enemy / they come from my wrong choices and the wrong choices of others. (Plenty of opportunity to practice being faithful.)
6. I have the choice to grow through these things through obedience and develop faithfulness, or I will stay the same.
7. What circumstance are you facing right now that is attacking your faithfulness? Where the situation wants to dictate your faith?
Relationship / priorities / temptation / finances / fears / unexpected event – injury – sickness – job loss. Will you let God grow your faithfulness?
Ps. 37:3 "Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness." (NASB)

B. God wants to grow our character rather than our comfort

Rom. 3:3-4 "...but we also rejoice in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (NIV)

1. If we don't persevere in our faith when we have difficulties, our character does not grow! We remain unchanged people. A faith that perseveres under pressure results in the transformation of character.
 2. We need to be people who pursue character transformation rather than personal comfort. WHY? We rarely change when we're comfortable. Comfort leads to spiritual atrophy and apathy = No strength or passion
- ** I love vacation. Palm trees / sand / warm water – But it's not reality! It's great for a short time, but to stay there wouldn't be healthy. No responsibility / no pressure / no stress / no exercise / too much food. = atrophy & apathy
- ** As believers, we have to change our expectations in this life from the pursuit of comfort to the pursuit of character. The pursuit of comfort will make you

weak and this is not God's desire for you.

3. It is God's desire to transform our character. He wants to mold us into the character of His Son. *II Cor. 3:18 "And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him and reflect His glory even more."* (NLT)
4. This is more important to Him than our personal comfort. WHY?
5. Because the more I'm like Jesus, the more He can use me; the more of His purposes I can fulfill; the more of His Kingdom I can build; the better I can represent Him to a community; the more my light shines in a dark world; the more of His power flows through my life; the more ground the enemy loses; the more victory we experience.
6. If we desire God to bring transformation to our area, then we first must be committed to the transformation of our character. As important as it is to see God raise the funds for this building, God's greater purpose will be to raise our character as a people. May we give ourselves to persevere in this.