

## Hebrew 11:17-40

The book of Hebrews was written for one purpose, that is, to convince its readers that Christ is worth following. If following Christ is free, there is no need to try so hard in convincing people. However, Christianity is worth convincing because there is a price in following Christ. For example, we know that the Jews in the first century had to face many societal consequences and persecutions as described in the previous chapters (Heb 10:32-33). The cost of following Christ was made quite clear to these Jewish Christians but nevertheless the writer of Hebrews still affirms that Christ is certainly worth following, and illustrates how they are able to joyfully accept the persecutions because they know they have a better possession, a binding one.

Another way of saying things is that our power to endure suffering is the result of a cost-benefit analysis. It is about the cost we are paying now and the great benefit we will fully receive when Christ returns for the second time. However, upon hearing the good news, people may still be hesitant for 2 main reasons. The first reason is that the cost is huge. Christ wants your full, uncompromised loyalty. He wants to be the top priority in your life - above self and family. He wants you to trust and obey, even to the point of death. The second reason is unbelief in the promises of Christ. With one or both of these two reasons, many have left Christ or only follow Him half-heartedly. We must realise that these 2 points are the very essence of the Christian call. Are you willing to believe in Christ? In the power of His atoning sacrifice? In the certainty of His promises even when believing it will entail suffering and persecutions?

From verse 17 and onwards, we are given examples of lives lived according to the Christian call. First, we see Abraham, who was challenged by God to give up his most treasured possession - his only son Isaac. Up until this point in time, no one could be absolutely sure if Abraham believed in God simply for His blessings. However, this sacrifice became the ultimate test of whether he worships God and not Isaac. Abraham had to decide between obedience to God or blessings of God even though God had made him a promise (quoted in v18) that would not be fulfilled through anyone else, only Isaac. In fact, for all God's promises to Abraham to come true, Isaac cannot die.

However, Abraham knew that the basis for all these promises was the faithfulness and truthfulness of his God. If YAHWEH is a God who doesn't keep His promises or a God who is capable of lying then the moment he sacrifices his son, he would lose it all. Though Abraham was in a state of confusion and despair when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, he listened to God and in his heart said "yes Lord, I trust you." Abraham did not know how God would fulfil His promises but he had faith that God could do it. In his wildest imagination he believed that if it comes to it, God will have the power to bring Isaac back to life. He believed that God will still fulfil His promise even if Isaac had to be sacrificed for the time being. Abraham's faith did not fail even though he did not know of God's plan. We all know that trusting God is straight forward but it's not easy - however, Abraham continued to hold on to God's promise and this same conviction continued to possess the entire thought of Abraham's family. They believed in God's promise as if it could be held in their hands, passing it from generation to generation with so much dedication and seriousness - as if all of God's promises had already come true, even when they were not. In fact, not one of them witnessed the fulfilment of God's promise, but still, they had such a deep obsession with God's promise.

Now, zooming back into the 21<sup>st</sup> century - the essence of the Christian faith has not changed one bit, it is a forward-looking hope. The Christian mind is still possessed by a future promise and we ought not to live for the here and now, but make every decision today with the future glory in mind.

Have you been living a life that eagerly awaits the return of your Saviour in glory? Have you been living for Christ's increase and your decrease? Have you been making life decisions according to the principle of self-denial? Many of us have formed routines to cope with the difficulties in life, but these routines may have nothing to do with God nor His promises. Perhaps your daily hope is to hoard more time for yourself - you see Christ as belonging to you, but you don't see yourself as belonging to Christ. You've taken your salvation for granted and to you, the hope of the resurrection will come in handy but it's not something that concerns you right now. Christianity is an investment that says "a life for a life" - it requires you to invest your current life in order to receive the greatest life in return. This is where many reformed Christians might make a huge mistake, misunderstanding the nature of this investment due to the belief in sola fide. We believe in faith alone - that we receive our salvation not by what we have done or will do, but rather it is a gift freely given to us and received by means of faith. However, because of this, a reformed Christian may start to think that "the only thing I'm investing in Christianity is my *approval* of Christianity - isn't that what faith is? I invest my faith by *affirming* that Jesus Christ is my Saviour, and out pops salvation!" This view is *almost* correct, but a faith like this is an untested faith and has a high chance of being a counterfeit faith. Counterfeit faith will be burned up by flames during the purification process while true faith, those who endure suffering for the Gospel will be commended by God.

The next section, that is verses 23-30 talks about the confirmation of Moses' and the Israelites' faith. How is their faith confirmed? It is confirmed when they endure suffering for obedience. For example, upon realising that their son was going to be used by God to save the Israelites from Egypt, Moses' parents hid their baby for 3 months even when Pharaoh ordered all Israelite boys to be killed. They believed in God, and by faith were not afraid of disobeying Pharaoh. When Moses grew up, he inherited his parents' faith even though he was adopted into Pharaoh's family. He chose to identify as an Israelite rather than an Egyptian royalty and because of this, lost everything. At every step of the way God continued to challenge the Israelites by asking them to trust and obey *now*, while believing in a future event that had not yet occurred. Because of this faith, they were able to cross the Red Sea unharmed and conquer Jericho by simply marching around it. Israel's faith was tested again and again but through it all, their faith grew more and more, and was confirmed again and again.

By verse 32, the author of Hebrews stops and says, "what more can I say? Is the evidence not enough?" Gideon, Barack, David and Samuel, these examples of faith are presented for us from age to age but in every age, the expression of faith is still the same. It is expressed by radical obedience and confirmed through Christian suffering. God says in Hebrews 10:38 that those who have true faith will not shrink back. The Old Testament saints did not see Jesus, but it was enough for them to know that God promised them a Messiah. We, on the other hand - we have seen Jesus and have received what was promised. The Christian life is not easy and our faith will be constantly tested and purified every day. However, we must show to the world, to the angels, to the demons, to God, and to ourselves that our heart and mind are entirely possessed by the thought of belonging to Christ and Christ belonging to us. So let us stay true to

our calling amidst both the easy and difficult seasons of life for ultimately there is no other better reason than this to live for.