



The Award Ceremony

Hebrews 11:32-40

I don't know if many of you enjoy watching the Olympics, but occasionally I will catch an event and watch athletes compete. What's really fun is watching how these athletes can accomplish amazing feats with their strength, agility and endurance. It's breath taking at times and you wonder to yourself, "How in the world did they accomplish that?" In the end, the winners will be gathered together at the "The Award Ceremony" and they will receive their awards for competing and winning in the events they have participated in. The Award Ceremony, however, does not take place until all of the athletes have competed for the prize.

This is the picture that I want to draw for us as we finish the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11. Read text Hebrews 11:32-40

This text is a continuing thought from our last Sunday's sermon. Mike Davito shared how faith is radical and visible and can be seen in the lives of the saints who have gone before us. However, he also mentioned that faith is communal. Faith is, in some spiritual way, manifested in the lives of past, present and future believers. There's this connectedness that we can't seem to put our finger on. How are we "one" with the saints who have gone before us? Well I am excited to answer that question this morning as we look at our text more closely.

How are we "one" with the saints who have gone before us?

1. Athletes in the Competition
2. Foreigners Away from Home
3. Victors Who Obtain the Gold

POINT 1: We are athletes in the competition. Much in the same way as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we too are competing to win the prize that has been set before us. We too should be looking forward to the promise that has been made.

We begin here where the author of Hebrews states in verse 32 that he just doesn't have enough time to bring up all the saints who were commended for their faith. Basically, "I don't have time to get into each one of their lives and explain it to you. You have the Scriptures, don't you? Read up! Search these men and women out and see how God's hand worked through them to bring about His glory." And truly, these testimonies are to display the work of God. Note what it says in verse 33, "who through faith..." It wasn't to their glory, but to God's.

It's actually interesting to see who the writer of Hebrews commends. Have you ever thought, "What in the world is Samson doing there?" That guy was selfish, sexual, narcissic... How did he end up here in the "Hall of Faith?" Gideon? That guy was hiding from the enemy. He wasn't turning to God. Even David himself has some really big mess-ups in his life. This doesn't look like a Hall of Faith. It looks more like a hall of weaklings and failures. But that's just the point isn't it? God demonstrates

His glory by using weak, sinful, and messed up people to display His power. It wasn't the people, it's the faith they had in a powerful God.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful... For He cannot deny Himself. – 2 Timothy 2:13

God reaches down and touches the heart of unbelievers, and by His grace, He can transform them to have a new life in Christ. God takes that person and lifts them up on a pedestal to demonstrate His power to the rest of the world. He isn't saying, "Look at how great and wonderful this individual is." NO! He is saying, "See how glorious and powerful I am that I can make someone dead come alive." Now, as children of the light, we give Him the praise and the glory.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. – Matthew 5: 14-16

This is how we should be reading Hebrews 11.

Now, when you think of a race in the Olympics, do all the athletes win? No, they don't. By very definition, to win implies that others lose. Beloved, if we are competing, then we should be competing to win, not lose. But I think we sometimes forget what it really means to win or to lose.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. – Hebrews 11:32-35_a

We say, "YEA! That's the team I want to be a part of. I want to associate with the winning team!"

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – Hebrews 11:35_b-37

"Wo, wait a minute! I love the Lord, but I don't do real well with the whole suffering bit. Me and trials don't go together to well. If there's going to be any of that, well... I'm out. I tag along with you until there's any sign of trouble. Don't make me have to demonstrate my faith." Beloved, to compete in the games requires extreme self-exertion and pain. Athletes spend hours icing torn ligaments and pulled muscles. They battle heat exhaustion and dehydration. Many times their injuries will disqualify them from continuing with the competition. Do you expect to win GOLD and put forth nothing?¹ Without trial or test to produce within you any endurance? Beloved, are you coasting through life with as little physical pain possible so that you can live comfortable, peaceful lives on earth? May it not be so. Trials will come, but they are for your growth in godliness and your spiritual good.²

¹ Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990. Page 517 – "And so, in our pilgrimage through this still groaning world (Rom. 8:22f.), it is inevitable that we too should endure suffering and hardship and required that we too should overcome by faith, our gaze fixed intently on him who is the goal and prize of our ultimate and eternal perfection."

² Hughes, R. Kent. Preaching the Word: Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. Page 379 – "God has not promised wholesale deliverance *in this life* for his people at all times and in every situation. Not all of us will be 'winners' in this life. From the world's point of view some people of faith are huge 'losers.'"

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Romans 12:1-2

Yes, some will accomplish great victories, but others will be led through the valley of the shadow of death.³ Yet, no matter what the earthly outcome, if our hope is set on rising again to a better life, we will be winners in glory.⁴

POINT 2: We are foreigners away from home. Typically, the majority of the athletes that compete in the Olympics are not at home. They are visiting the host country and representing their homes away from home. Picture yourself in a foreign country where the language is different, the food is different, the people are different and the living arrangements are different. They seem to provide some fleeting comforts, but deep inside you know – it isn't home.

A few weeks back, Pastor Timothy brought out the point that we are exiles, living in a land that is not our own depicted in verse 13.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. – Hebrews 11:13

I think it's important that we talk about this again because the writer of Hebrews addresses it again with a stronger emphasis. See again what the passage says in verses 37 and 38.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. – Hebrews 11:37-38

How many of you enjoy putting together those massive puzzles? I'm talking about the 1000+ piece club. Where you have a thousand pieces to put together and you find this one piece that just doesn't seem to fit anywhere. You lay it aside and keep working, then you pick it up again and... nope. It just doesn't fit. You keep going and then you begin to realize something is off. You study it. It looks right, has the right colors, the right dimensions and size as all the other pieces, but it just doesn't seem to fit anywhere. It belongs to another puzzle. A heavenly one.

If you are a believer in Christ, then you ought not to fit anywhere in life. You might look like you fit, but truly you don't. You are of another breed. Our world and our culture flaunts sensuality and success as the gods of earth. Men aren't truly men unless they have money and power through accomplishments. Women aren't truly women unless they look like the front page of *Cover Girl*. The world says it's okay to have an affair with your neighbor's spouse. It's okay to be independent and narcissistic. And by all means, the world says you *should* accept homosexuality and abortion and to say otherwise would be a "hate" crime.

The text literally says, "the world is not worthy of you." The Greek word for "world" here is *kosmos*. I find it interesting that this is the same word used by the apostle John over and over again in his Gospel and also in his Epistles. He records that the world was no place for Christ either. Observe.

³ The MacArthur Study Bible (Revised & Updated Edition), New King James Version. Study Note (Hebrews 11:33-38) "The many accomplishments and sufferings described in these verses apply generally to those faithful saints. Some experienced great success, whereas others suffered great affliction. The point is that they all courageously and uncompromisingly followed God, regardless of the earthly outcome. They placed their trust in Him and in His promises (cf. 6:12; 2 Tim. 3:12)."

⁴ Longman III, Tremper. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews, Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006. Page 162 – "These who appear as losers in the world's eyes are thus ultimately winners with God, and their pilgrim orientation is memorably summed up in the verdict 'the world was not worthy of them' (v.38)."

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. – John 1:10-11

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. – John 3:19

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. – 1 John 2:15

He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” – John 8:23

1. The term “world” meaning the people in the world (inhabitants).
2. The term “world” meaning the earth and its geography.

In my opinion, both meanings could correctly be applied here. In one sense, the people have rejected God’s children⁵ because they have rejected God Himself. Therefore, the world is not worthy to commune with the people of God since they are not of God’s flock.⁶ In another sense, the world was not worthy of God’s people because it could not provide a home for them.⁷ The text says they wander in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves. Whether it is the people on earth who are not worthy to host God’s children, or whether it is the physical dimensions of the earth itself – the world is not our home.

How are we living our lives here and now as if this is not our home. I ask the question again, “Beloved, are you coasting through life with as little physical pain possible so that you can live comfortable, peaceful lives on earth?” Have you become just a little too comfortable with the fruit of your labor? Our hope for the award awaiting us should cause us to look forward with great anticipation to the heavenly realm. Set your thoughts on Heaven! Feast your minds on His throne.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. – Colossians 3:1-2

We are exiles and sojourners in a world that is not worthy of us. This is our call to faith. How are you living that way today? Here’s an even tougher question. If this is our faith, then shouldn’t we be teaching our children the same way? Are you training your children to live as exiles? Are you raising them up in a home that is not home? Are you teaching them what it *really* means to win?

I get it. I know all too well the desire for you men to want to provide for your wives and for your children so that they can “feel at home.” But how are we teaching them to live as exiles? We have to tell them that mommy and daddy will never be able to give them a true home like Christ can. Their world is going to crumble someday. We must give them the hope that is found Christ – a hope for a better home.

POINT 3: We are victors who obtain the gold. Much like the saints listed here in the Hall of Faith, we too will be listed as God’s faithful children, and we will obtain the prize. Just like the writer of Hebrews says in Chapter 10 verse 39.

⁵ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. Page 381 – “The calculated irony here is that the world has rejected such people, and yet the world does not deserve to have them even if it were to accept them.”

⁶ Longman III, Tremper. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews, Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006. Page 165 – “Our author’s expression is heavily ironical: the world saw such people as misfits, and so they were, but not because of *their* ‘unworthiness’ but rather that of the world itself, which is no fit place for God’s people, even though it must be the place of their pilgrimage toward heaven.”

⁷ New ESV Study Bible (ESV Text Edition:2011), Crossway. Study Note (Hebrews 11:38) – “See v. 7. Their presence in the world was itself evidence of God’s grace, for their proclamation of the word of God to sinful people was a greater privilege than the people deserved.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. – Hebrews 10:39

This should give us great encouragement and a fearlessness to march on toward glory. In some way, we will obtain the prize that is waiting for us in glory. Let's read the last two verses of Hebrews 11 and behold the great award ceremony that awaits us.

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. – Hebrews 11:39-40

This small text is both confusing and glorious at the same time. The saints who have gone before us *did not* (and might I add "have not") received what was promised. "Wait a minute, I thought that 'to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord'?" Correct. The saints who have gone before us *are* present with the Lord, but there is still something that they are lacking – the promise. "Okay," we say, "What is the promise?" The promise is everything – every spiritual blessing. Paul says in Ephesians 1,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. – Ephesians 1:3-4

Every promise that has been made to those who are called according to His purpose. The promise of a home. The promise of a new body⁸. The promise of an inheritance. The promise of rest. The promise of a city whose designer and builder is God. The saints who have gone before us have not yet obtained these things.⁹ They cannot, because we are not yet there with them. The awards cannot be given until all of the athletes have finished competing for the prize. Therefore, they cannot be made perfect or be awarded the prize until we are gathered there with them in glory.¹⁰ Then, at that point, all of God's children will participate in the award ceremony, and Christ Himself will come to us and say, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter now into the glory of the Father." He will award us with a crown of gold.

Jesus is truly the culmination of every promised blessing in the heavenly places. Jesus came to this earth, died on the cross in my place, forgave me all my sins and now promises me a crown of glory. He was the true victor. Without Christ, I can't compete in the event. Even my best efforts would be worthless. I must put my trust in Christ to win the prize for me. And Jesus wins the prize for me and for all of you who put their trust in Him. All we have to do is compete, remembering that the prize is already waiting for us.¹¹

⁸ Desiring God <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-we-receive-our-resurrection-bodies-when-we-die-or-at-the-end-of-the-age>
"The resurrection of the body will occur at the end of the age when Christ returns."

⁹ New Geneva Study Bible (Christian Statesman Edition), NKJV, Coral Ridge Ministries. Study Note (Hebrews 11:40) "something better... apart from us. This verse asserts both the redemptive-historical difference between the Old Testament and New Testament periods, and the unity of the people of God in both eras. Though the Old Testament believers lived by faith (10:38), they were not privileged to witness on earth the fulfillment of the great promise of God. Nevertheless, they too participated in the benefits of Christ's high-priestly work, and, along with the new covenant saints, they are 'made perfect.' Those of the old and new eras together await the perfection that will appear only at the Second Coming (12:26; 13:14; Rom. 8:18; Eph. 1:9, 10)."

¹⁰ New ESV Study Bible (ESV Text Edition:2011), Crossway. Study Note (Hebrews 11:39-40) – "The saints of the OT, along with those of this era, will partake together of the same end-times perfection: sinless selves in deathless resurrection bodies."

¹¹ Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990. Page 517 – "At the cross our redemption has been accomplished once for all. But there is still an interval between this fulfillment and the final consummation. We still await the renewal of all creation, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:21-25), the swallowing up of what is mortal by life (2 Cor. 5:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:42ff.), the disclosure of the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness is unchallenged (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-5).

Beloved, this is our hope. We are one with the saints who have gone before us because we are athletes in the same race, longing for the same home, and victors of the same prize!

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