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Sermon Notes

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## **The Heroes of the Faith and their Mighty Acts**

### **Hebrews 11:32-34**

#### I. Time Fails Us Now... It Won't Fail Us in Heaven

A. "And what more shall I say?" Time would fail me...

***ESV Hebrews 11:32 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***

1. The author has been tracing out in more or less chronological order key examples of faith from the OT
2. Now... the Author Seems to Punt on the Rest of OT History... but his points are made

B. "Time Would Fail Me..."

1. Here is the rub of our earthly life

***James 4:14 What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.***

***Psalms 39:5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.***

2. The author acknowledges that, even when it comes to magnificent, rich events of faith, there is not enough time to cover them all
3. Similar to John's statement about Jesus Christ:

***John 21:25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.***

4. Mortal life never has enough time to do all the good things we would like to do
5. But heaven is not so!!...

C. Heavenly Leisure: Becoming Experts in Church History... and Theology

1. In heaven, there will be no such limitation
2. “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.”
3. We’ll have fellowship with the greatest people who have ever lived
4. We belong to a royal lineage, a noble family of faith

***1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God***

5. We will sit at table with these great heroes of the faith:

***Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.***

- a. To sit with Martin Luther and talk with him (no translator needed!!) about what it was like to stand at the Diet of Worms and courageously defend the doctrine of justification by faith alone
- b. To talk with William Tyndale who translated the Bible into English and paid for it with his life as he was burned at the stake
- c. To have a meal with martyrs who died under the Roman Empire’s vicious persecution; great heroes like Polycarp (martyred at Smyrna) and the noble woman Felicitas, who gave up the life of a Roman aristocrat to follow Christ, even to her death
- d. To walk through the meadows and valleys of the New Earth with a mighty explorer missionary like David Livingstone and ask him what it was like to probe the mysterious and dangerous heart of Africa
- e. To converse with a beautiful hymnwriter like Fanny Crosby, who was blind on earth but can see perfectly now... to speak with her about her prayer life, and what she experienced that led her to write the incredible words to “Blessed Assurance”

Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
 Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;  
 Angels, descending, bring from above  
 Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,  
 I in my Savior am happy and blest,  
 Watching and waiting, looking above,  
 Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

f. To talk with Chinese brothers and sisters who died in the communist crackdowns during the Cultural Revolution

g. BUT we cannot probe all these stories now...

## II. The Mysteries of this List

### A. Why the Author Makes This List

1. Why does the author break off his survey of church history at this point?
2. Why does he start to summarize right after the Jews enter the Promised Land and conquer Jericho?
3. Does he feel that the point has been made... that by faith we should not love our lives so much as to shrink from death? That we are merely aliens and strangers here on earth? That we should live otherworldly lives in this present age... filled with hope in our future home, the glorious city that He is building for us... the magnificent world to which we are going?
4. Why the staccato burst of names and serial list of achievements?

### B. Why These Particular Heroes are Chosen and Others Left Out

1. Even more puzzling, why are these the specific people chosen
2. The author zeroes in on six individuals that span the gap from the conquest of Jericho to the coming of King David... they are perhaps not the people we would have chosen
3. Why was Jephthah chosen, and not Jonathan?
4. Why was Barak chosen and not Deborah?
5. Why was Samson chosen, given that he had such obvious moral failings?
6. Why was Gideon chosen, given the frailty of his faith at the start?
7. Why was there no one beyond David? Why not godly prophets named like Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, or Jeremiah?

### C. Why These Heroes are Listed in This Order?

1. Why does the author, who has been following a very careful chronological accounting of Old Testament heroes of the faith seem to scramble these figures?
2. Why for example, does he mention Gideon (Judges 6-8) BEFORE Barak (Judges 2-4)? Why does he list David before Samuel?

3. One thing's for certain: the Holy Spirit guided him in doing everything he wrote. This was no accident or off-the-cuff effort... every single word is exactly how God wanted it to be through the Holy Spirit.
4. BUT that doesn't mean that we will be able accurately to surmise the answer to these mysteries.

#### D. How These Heroes Display Faith

1. This is the REAL question before us... for the author is seeking to help each one of us live by faith
2. Before this chapter

***Hebrews 10:38-39 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.*** <sup>39</sup> ¶ ***But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.***

3. After this chapter

***Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.***

4. This is the CLOUD of WITNESSES!!! By their example and by faith in the same God who helped them, we also will be able to finish our race
5. Thus the real issue is: how can these heroes of the faith and their catalogue of amazing acts of faith help stimulate us to similar courage and endurance in the Christian life

#### E. Division of the List: Triumphant Heroes (vs. 32-35a) and Suffering Heroes (35b-38)

1. Triumphant Heroes are those who achieved great things for God... whose faith led them to what anyone would call "success" for the most part
2. Suffering Heroes are those who achieved great things for God by bearing patiently the sufferings of a harsh, God-hating world; more on them next week!!

### III. The Central Lesson: Weakness Turned into Strength

***Hebrews 11:34 whose weakness was turned to strength***

- A. This is the MAIN LESSON I think of these people
- B. Came First and Foremost from Studying Gideon... the First Example

### C. Gideon's Time

1. The era of the Judges... more on that in a moment
2. The key issue: Israel's faithless lapse into godless idolatry in the pattern of the nations around them
3. God would sell the Jews into the hands of Gentile invaders who would afflict them harshly
4. The Jews would then cry out to God for deliverance
5. God would send a judge to lead Israel both militarily and politically
6. In Gideon's era, the Midianites were overwhelming and oppressive

***Judges 6:2-6 Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. <sup>3</sup> Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. <sup>4</sup> They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys..... Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.***

### D. Gideon's Weakness

1. When we first meet Gideon, he was trying to thresh wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites
2. This was a terrible place to do this... usually, you would thresh on a broad flat place where the wind can blow away the chaff; a winepress was usually a depressed area, like a vat, more hidden; therefore the wind would have a very difficult time blowing away the chaff
3. The winepress was a very HUMBLING place for Gideon to try to thresh the wheat
4. One scholar:

God used the winepress to humble Gideon and show him his weakness much in the same way he used the back of the desert and a father-in-law's sheep to humble Moses... God used their weakness to prepare them for GREAT THINGS

5. Gideon deeply humbled... SMALL IN HIS OWN EYES

***Judges 6:12-13 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." <sup>13</sup> "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders***

*that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."*

6. The Lord answered very surprisingly:

***Judges 6:14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"***

7. Here is Gideon's sense of weakness:

***Judges 6:15 "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."***

E. Gideon's "Strength"

1. Gideon's real strength was his immense sense of WEAKNESS and NEED
2. AND that he would turn that weakness back to God in prayer
3. The Lord therefore made a promise to Gideon...

***Judges 6:16 The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."***

4. God is motivated by weakness, by need

F. Gideon's Weak Faith... Got Stronger and Stronger

1. Gideon is chosen for his faith... but at the beginning, his faith was terribly WEAK
2. He asked for THREE SIGNS one after the other

***Judges 6:17-18 Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. <sup>18</sup> Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."***

- a. First, the offering... supernaturally consumed by the angel's staff... then the angel disappeared. But that wasn't enough...
  - b. Second, He asked for the famous FLEECE as a sign... if the fleece was wet w. dew and the ground dry, he would believe; it HAPPENED
  - c. Third, HE ASKED AGAIN!!! For the opposite: fleece dry and the ground around it wet... again it happened
3. Even then, God sent him to hear a dream the Midianites had had about him

4. God built this man up step by step
  - a. His first commission was to destroy his father's altar to Baal and the Asherah pole he had set up... he did so AT NIGHT because he was afraid of his family and of the citizens of his town
  - b. Next God poured out His Spirit on Gideon and gave him the power to lead Israel... this is the key to all the achievements of any man or woman of faith

***Judges 6:34 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning [Israel] to come join him in fighting the Midianites***

5. By the end of his exploits he was mighty in faith... His faith had grown from a mustard seed to a mighty tree

#### G. Gideon's Success

1. God used Gideon and his tiny army of 300 men to defeat the Midianites
2. Without a sword in their hands, by faith, they stood still and saw God fight for them
3. The Midianites turned against each other and slay themselves

#### H. Weakness Turned into Strength

***James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."***

***2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

GOD'S POWER is MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS... that was the "strength Gideon had"

So we also have that kind of strength

We must turn away from SELF-RELIANCE and learn to rely on God alone BY FAITH

## IV. The Heroes Listed Quickly

- A. The Era of the Judges: Bewildering and Wicked
- B. Summation from the Book of Judges Itself

*ESV Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

1. Fundamental flaw: Israel did not know God or God's word

*Judges 2:10-11 After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. <sup>11</sup> ¶ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.*

2. The Levites failed badly

*Malachi 2:7 For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction-- because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.*

3. "Faith comes by hearing..."
4. Yet, even in the midst of this, God raised up believers

*Romans 11:2-5 "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." <sup>5</sup> So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*

5. There is a REMNANT in every generation... always raised up by faith in the word of God

C. Gideon: Already Mentioned

D. Barak: A Weak Man Who Trusted the Word of God Spoken by a Prophetess

E. Samson: A Physically Strong Man Who was Morally Weak... and Yet, Mighty by Faith

1. Many mighty deeds recorded of him in Judges
2. He ripped a young lion to shreds with his bare hands... a lion can weigh 500 pounds
3. Amazingly, if you really think about it, there was NO NEED for Samson to have been physically strong himself

*Zechariah 4:6 Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*

4. Everything amazing that Samson did, he did by faith in the power of God... the SPIRIT of God came upon him in power and he killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey, or ripped up some city gates and threw them over a hill
5. Again and again in Judges, the phrase shows up



**[Othniel] Judges 3:10** *The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war.*

**Judges 6:34** *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.*

**Judges 11:29** *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.*

**Judges 14:6** *The Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat.*

**Judges 14:19** *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men*

**Judges 15:14-15** *As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. <sup>15</sup> Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.*

6. The lesson of Hebrews 11 concerning all these heroes is that ONLY BY FAITH were they able to do these great things... because their faith opened the channel for God's Spirit to come upon them in power

#### F. Jephthah: The Most Surprising of the Entries

**Judges 11:30-31** *And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, <sup>31</sup> whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."*

1. It turned out to be his DAUGHTER!! A strange occurrence... some think that all he vowed was that she should be a virgin for the rest of her life and not marry
2. In any case, such vows are generally frowned upon in Scripture
3. Jephthah is celebrated here not for his vow but for the faith that enabled him to become mighty in Spirit and win the victory for Israel

#### G. David: No Surprise at All... but Faith is the Key to Understanding Him

1. But it was only by faith that he won his initial victory over Goliath, and only by faith did he become King of Israel and rule so wisely... more about him in a moment

#### H. Samuel: By Faith Hearing God's Voice, Identifying David, and Warning the People

1. Samuel is singled out here because of his faith in hearing God speaking to him
2. The little boy Samuel began his ministry simply by hearing God speak to him in the dark of the night, and then faithfully reporting to Eli what God had said

#### I. The Prophets: A Summary of a Category of Courageous Faith-Filled People

1. The Prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord were **UNIVERSALLY PERSECUTED**
2. They were asked to do some of the most difficult things God ever asked anyone to do
3. **BY FAITH** Elijah powerfully stood before wicked king Ahab and declared a drought by the judgment of God... and he boldly stood against the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel
4. **BY FAITH** Elisha boldly confronted the Arameans who had come to seize him
5. **BY FAITH** Isaiah saw the clearest visions of the Christ found in the Old Testament
6. **BY FAITH** Jeremiah boldly predicted the coming of the Babylonians and was hated and persecuted viciously by his countrymen
7. **BY FAITH** Ezekiel laid on one side and prophesied for 390 consecutive days against a replica of Jerusalem... one day for each year that Israel had sinned against God; then, when those days were ended, he lay on the opposite side for 40 more days... the whole time he was eating famine rations
8. These prophets did some amazing and bizarre things when the Spirit of God came upon them... they spoke the truth to a wicked and perverse generation, day after day

#### V. What Faith Has Achieved

##### A. Everything Done **BY FAITH**

1. Great men have made incredible impacts on human history
2. Alexander conquered a vast empire in a lightning conquest lasting just 14 years, stretching from Greece, down to Egypt and across to India... **BUT HE DID NOT DO IT BY FAITH**

3. Julius Caesar did the same for the Roman Empire... conquering Gaul, subduing the warring factions of the Romans and uniting them for the most powerful Empire the world had ever known... BUT NOT BY FAITH
4. Plato philosophized mightily with awesome clarity and reasoning powers... BUT NOT BY FAITH
5. Galen the physician studied the human body and advanced medical knowledge more than any who had preceded him... BUT NOT BY FAITH
6. Archimedes invented awesome technologies and studies physical; principles and laid the groundwork for later scientific advances... BUT NOT BY FAITH
7. Genghis Khan... Napoleon... Confucius... the list goes on and on and great leaders and earth-shaking insights... BUT NOT BY FAITH
8. This list of otherwise unknown men and women who did great things... their actions are remembered and celebrated by God for only one reason: these things they did BY FAITH

#### B. What Achievements are Listed

***Hebrews 11:33-34 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.***

##### 1. Through Faith Conquered Kingdoms

- a. Author almost certainly thinking first and foremost of Joshua
- b. After the conquest of Jericho, they fought one battle after another conquering the Promised Land
- c. When five Kings of the Amorites joined forces, the temptation was great for Joshua and Israel to be terrified
- d. But God spoke to Joshua this promise

***Joshua 10:8 The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you."***

- e. By faith Joshua did an all-night march, surprised them and routed them

##### 2. Through Faith Administered Justice

- a. Once the territory was conquered, it had to be administered properly

- b. By faith, judges and kings ruled the people WISELY with JUSTICE and RIGHTEOUSNESS
- c. David meted out swift justice to the men who killed Saul's son, Ish-bosheth... his kingdom was not to be founded on wickedness and bloodshed
- d. Solomon was known for his wise judgments too... as in the case of the two prostitutes and the baby... BY FAITH wise justice is administered
- e. Unbelieving kings and judges act wickedly out of SELF-INTEREST... they are willing to defraud widows and the weak to make themselves rich

***Proverbs 16:12 Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.***

### 3. Through Faith Gained What Was Promised

- a. Faith takes God's promises like a signed check of immense value and carries them to the bank of God's omnipotence to be cashed
- b. These heroes of the faith took God's promises seriously, and by faith they received what was promised
  - i) God promised Joshua that he would conquer the Promised Land... Gideon that he would defeat the Midianites...
  - ii) God promised David that one day he would be king
  - iii) ALL OF THESE were against all odds... Joshua faced a mighty walled city... Gideon was greatly outnumbered... so was David as he faced Saul
- c. WHAT PROMISES ARE YOU TRUSTING GOD FOR NOW???

### 4. Through Faith Shut the Mouths of Lions

- a. BY FAITH Daniel was rescued...

***Daniel 6:22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.***

HOW IS YOUR QUIET TIME? HOW PRECIOUS IS YOUR TIME WITH GOD TO YOU? By faith, do you choose God above all earthly pleasures?

### 5. Through Faith Quenched the Fury of the Flames

- a. Also the book of Daniel... only this was Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

b. By faith, they made this incredible statement:

***Daniel 3:17-18 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.***

c. By faith, they were delivered IN THE MIDST OF THE FIERY FURNACE... God sent the Angel of the Lord, “one like the Son of God” to walk with them in the furnace

d. When they came out, not a hair of their heads had been singed, and there was no smell of fire on them

e. BUT THEIR FAITH PRECEDED THEIR DELIVERANCE

6. Through Faith Escaped the Edge of the Sword

a. BY FAITH David was delivered from the sword of Goliath, the Philistines... he went out to meet this giant trusting in the power of God

***1 Samuel 17:45 "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.***

b. Ultimately David declared this about the sword:

***1 Samuel 17:47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands.***

c. All who live by the sword die by the sword... David NEITHER lived nor died by the sword... though the sword chased him all his life

d. By faith David was delivered from the sword of Saul, then from the sword of the Amalekites, then from the sword of the Philistines, then from the sword of the Edomites, of the Moabites, Ammonites... he won battle after battle... as a mighty leader of men, he swung the sword again and again, but he was himself delivered from the edge of the sword

***Psalm 91:7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.***

e. So the MARTYRS have faced the sword of government laws, government executions... many many many have been killed, their blood shed by the wicked sword of antichristian tyrants... but though they may have died physically, nothing can separate them from the love of Christ:

***Romans 8:35-37 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.***

- f. What SWORD faces you? Probably you are not a soldier, facing a physical weapon... but our battle is spiritual, and Satan swings the double-edged sword of temptation on the one side, and accusation of sin on the other
  - g. With this sharp double-edged sword, Satan seeks to slice us off from Christ
  - h. BY FAITH we escape the edge of this sword of sin and guilt
7. Through Faith Overcame Weakness and Became Strong
- a. This is the central lesson as mentioned
  - b. Faith FLOURISHES when we recognize our weakness and God OMNIPOTENCE
  - c. God rushes in to deliver the humble who cry aloud to Him
  - d. WHAT IS YOUR WEAKNESS? Where are you UNABLE to face the challenges of Satan or fulfill the commands of God
  - e. BY FAITH YOUR WEAKNESS CAN BE TURNED INTO STRENGTH!!
  - f. By faith, you can return to Christ and to the power of the cross and feel the strength of God flow back into your soul again

***Psalm 23:2-3 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.***

8. Through Faith Became Powerful in Battle
- a. Many of the heroes in Hebrews 11 mentioned here were military conquerors... men who were mighty in battle and who won great victories on the field of blood
  - b. We fight a different kind of battle...
  - c. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against Satan's dark kingdom
  - d. Our warfare is not earthly but spiritual... conquering the flaming arrows of temptation and fear and depression and selfishness and lust and pride

- e. With the mighty SHIELD OF FAITH we can extinguish ALL THE FLAMING ARROWS of the evil one

#### 9. Through Faith Routed Foreign Armies

- a. Time and time again, the Old Testament gives us incredible accounts of mighty foreign armies put to flight
- b. For example, in the days of Asa, a vast army of one million Ethiopian soldiers invaded tiny Judah and thought to conquer it
- c. Asa totally relied on God BY FAITH:

***2 Chronicles 14:11-13 Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, "LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O LORD, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you." <sup>12</sup> The LORD struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled, <sup>13</sup> and Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar. Such a great number of Cushites fell that they could not recover; they were crushed before the LORD and his forces. The men of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder.***

- d. These military lessons are given us to teach us to rely on God for all the opposition we may face

#### C. The Life of True Faith is ACTIVE

- 1. Faith without works is DEAD
- 2. These activities are powerful testimony to the validity of their faith
- 3. So also OUR LIVES should be filled with bold actions for the glory of God