

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 22 May 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Report Card Day

Hebrews 11:32-40

When I was growing up, I was one of those nerdy kids who always got “straight A’s” on his report card at the end of every school quarter. However, I wasn’t content merely to get all “A’s”; it had to be all “A pluses.” If I had any plain “A’s,” or especially any “A minuses,” I was a bit downcast about it.

Why did I sweat so hard to get that good report card? Well, it really wasn’t because of any material reward. My parents usually did *something* to reward me for my good report cards; but it was rarely anything more than a hot fudge sundae at McDonalds. I think what motivated me in my younger years was a deep desire to please my parents. However, as I grew older, and as I grew in the Lord, I became motivated by something even deeper--namely, a desire to please the Lord. I wanted a good report card to present to *Him*.

Well, guess what, brethren? In Heaven one day, there will be a “report card” for every believer. Now, praise God, our *entrance into Heaven* will not depend upon how good the report is. God’s standard is absolute perfection; and we can’t even come close to that standard. That’s why we need a Saviour! Because God’s Son took on human flesh, kept God’s standard of righteousness perfectly, and offered up His sinless life as the ransom for ours, God accepts *anyone* who will let go of his own “righteousness,” and trust in Jesus instead. If you have believed on Jesus, you are saved *forever*.

Nonetheless, there *is* a “Report Card Day” coming, Christian. On that future day, you will receive a report on your *service to God*, and will be rewarded for what you truly did for Him; and you may be sure that God is keeping infinitely better records than your schoolteachers ever did. If you are walking with the Lord as you should, then you are being motivated not so much by the *reward* that you will receive, as by the thought of hearing your Father say, “***Well done, thou good and faithful servant.***” For me, it meant the world to hear my daddy say, “Great job on your report card, Laddy Bear!”; and in the same way, it will mean the world to every Christian to hear the Father say, “Well done, my child.”

This morning, we will be breezing through a host of “heroes of the faith”--people who, by faith, obtained a “good report” before God. These people had very different backgrounds, and very different trials to go through. Some of these saints’ stories had “good endings.” (In other words, God’s servants won in a big, obvious way, and Satan’s servants “got theirs.”) However, many of these believers’ stories did *not* have “good endings”; and in the end, the “bad guys” *seemed* to prevail. Many of these believers suffered horribly, and found no deliverance. Yet, regardless of how their lives ended, all of them, by faith, obtained a good report. As we study this passage, we will see how we, too, can obtain a good report in our lives. The title of this message is ***Report Card Day***.

Read Hebrews 11:32-40.

The Apostle Paul is now launching into his final list of heroes of faith. There are so many of them, that he doesn’t even name them, or spend more than a phrase on each one. He simply gives us a quick-moving montage of pictures from these people’s lives; and as he does so, he reminds us that these

courageous acts were all done *by faith*. These acts were not accomplished by these people's own power, but by trust and dependence upon the LORD. First of all, Paul says that by faith...

I. They conquered enemies.

In **verse 33**, Paul says that these heroes of faith "*subdued kingdoms.*" Now, to whom does this refer? It could refer to *many* people in Israel's history! He could be talking about **Moses**, when he led the children of Israel in battle against Sihon and Og, the giant kings of the Amorites. He could be talking about **Joshua**, or any of **the judges**, or even **David**, who completed the conquest of Canaan during his day. These men had a mandate from the LORD to conquer the land, and to make no league with the wicked inhabitants of it; and they obeyed.

You know, engaging in continual warfare is not something that comes easy for any culture. Eventually, people tire of war. Yet, God specifically *commanded* the children of Israel to do just that. He commanded them to annihilate the wicked inhabitants of Canaan, until they were utterly driven from the land. Yet, time and time again, the Israelites stopped warring, and made peace with the Canaanites; and when they did, they ended up learning the Canaanites' evil ways, and worshipping their gods. Because of this, God allowed them to be defeated by their enemies.

In contrast, the men and women of faith were *not* afraid to subdue kingdoms. Why were they not afraid? Because their God had promised, "*Let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; for the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you*" (**Deuteronomy 20:3-4**). They knew the promises of God's Word, and they claimed them.

Now, as Christians living in the New Testament age, our mandate is very different from that of Old Testament Israel. We are not commanded to wage physical war against flesh-and-blood enemies of God, as the children of Israel were. However, we do wrestle against the same spiritual force that energized the wicked Canaanites. We are waging war against Satan, and his army of wicked spirits.

Read Ephesians 6:10-17.

The battle against our unseen enemy is very real, Christian. Are you aware of Satan's wiles? Are you daily putting on the armour of God? You cannot afford to ignore your adversary. He *wants* you to think that he is harmless, so that you will be vulnerable to his attacks. On the other hand, you cannot afford to *fear* him, either. God is the only One whom we should fear. When you fear God, and trust in Him, He gives you the power you need to conquer your foe. **Romans 8:35-37** says, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*"

Too many Christians are falling in the battle. A true Christian cannot lose his salvation when he falls; but he can lose his effectiveness for God. We are in a battle, Christian. Don't forget it! Put on your armour, and fight! There is a report card day coming! These men of old subdued kingdoms, and obtained a good report, because they lived by faith.

Secondly, we see that through faith,

II. They laboured for righteousness.

In **Hebrews 11:33**, Paul tells us that these heroes “*wrought righteousness.*” The word “*wrought*” means “laboured, or toiled, for.” These believers did all in their power to *live* righteously; to *instruct others* in God’s righteous ways; and to *uphold righteousness* in the land. David is a perfect example of this kind of person. Let’s look at **Psalm 101**, and see what his desire was.

Read Psalm 101.

David’s desire to uphold righteousness is expressed so fervently in this psalm, that if you skipped over the first three verses, and started to read in **verse 4**, you’d think that God Himself were speaking directly! This is what happens when a believer walks by faith. God’s desire becomes *the believer’s* desire. More and more, God’s actual righteousness is manifested in that Christian’s life. Yet, this process does not take place without a struggle.

Read Romans 7:18 - 8:4.

In the last part of **chapter 7**, Paul reminds us that there is a struggle going on inside every believer, 24-7. Who are the contenders? On the one hand, there is the believer’s new mind, which desires to serve God; and on the other hand, there is the flesh, which is still subject to the law of sin. These two are mortal enemies; and they are always at war with each other. However, we see two encouraging truths in **verse 1** of **chapter 8**. First, we see that those who are “*in Christ*” (those who are saved) are no longer condemned. There is no more possibility of their going to the Lake of Fire. The other encouraging truth is that those who are truly saved can, and *do*, walk after the Spirit. That doesn’t mean that they never give in to their flesh; but it does mean that through Christ, they have the ability to walk in the Spirit. More and more, their lives are characterised by walking in the Spirit, and not the flesh.

Before a person is saved, he may *try* to keep the Law; but no matter how hard he tries, he cannot please God. That is why Christ did for us what the Law could never do. **(Read verse 3 again.)**

Not only did Christ’s death on the cross free us from the *penalty* of sin: His death also freed us from the *power* of sin. Though we will have the sin nature for as long as we are in this mortal body, we no longer *have* to sin. God has given us a *new* mind, and a *new* nature, which is placed there by Christ Himself! As long as you submit to God, and walk in the Spirit, you *will* find victory over sin. That is a promise! And what is the result? The result is that the “righteousness of God” is fulfilled in you. **Christ’s actual righteousness is manifested in your life. (Read verse 4 again.)**

Through Christ, you are able to produce righteousness, and to “obtain a good report” before God. “*Being then made free from sin,*” we have become “*the servants of righteousness*” (**Romans 6:18**). Christian, are you trusting God to produce righteousness in your life?

The heroes of old subdued kingdoms, and wrought righteousness; and as they did so...

III. They obtained promises.

In **verse 33**, we read that these heroes “*obtained promises.*” Now, does this mean that God *made* promises to them, but didn’t necessarily *fulfil* them within their lifetimes? Or does it mean that God *made* promises, and also *fulfilled* those promises within their lifetimes? The answer is: both!

Take **Hannah**, for instance. For the longest time, Hannah was barren; but in His time, God fulfilled His promise, and gave her a son. (In fact, God gave her three more sons and two daughters after her first son, Samuel, was born!) To **Gideon**, and to many other judges of Israel, God fulfilled His promise of giving them victory against their enemies. To **David**, on the other hand, God made a promise that has still not been completely fulfilled. God promised David that his son, Solomon, would build the Temple; that his throne would be established forever; and that the Messiah would come from his line. Did David see any of those promises fulfilled? Yes, his throne was established, and he did see Solomon come to the throne just before his death; however, David’s royal line ceased in 586 B.C., when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. For many centuries, the throne of David has not been occupied. However, it will be reclaimed by David’s descendant, **Jesus Christ**, when he returns to earth to sit on David’s throne forever!

Of course, the biggest promise of all—the promise of the Messiah—was a promise that *none* of the Old Testament believers ever saw in their lifetimes. In **verse 39**, Paul points out these Old Testament believers “*received not the promise.*” What promise? The promise of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. They waited all their lives to see God’s salvation in the person of the Messiah; but they never got to see Him. Yet, the saints of the Old Testament clung to that promise of the coming Saviour. They “*died in faith,*” and obtained a good report.

Now, we who are saved today *have* seen the fulfilment of God’s promise of the Messiah. We have the privilege of knowing that Christ has already come, and has paid for our sins. We have the privilege of being permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We have many more privileges, as well—all of which spring from the indwelling of the Spirit. He **protects** us (often times *in spite* of our foolishness). He **guides** us, and shows us what to do, and where to go. He **provides** our every need. He **comforts** us in distress. He **illuminates truth** to us. He **answers prayers** (sometimes answering “no,” because He has a better plan). He **enables and empowers us** to serve Him.

Now, there are some promises that are guaranteed to every believer, because they are part of the “salvation package.” The resurrection is one of those promises. Many New Testament believers will live to see the resurrection of their bodies; others will have to go through the river of death first, and await the Resurrection Day up in Heaven. However, *every* believer will obtain the promise of the resurrection one day. There are many other promises, however, that can only be attained as the believer continually walks by faith. God wants to do mighty things in and through us; but if we would obtain the promises, we must trust Him. Are *you* “obtaining promises,” Christian, and “obtaining a good report”?

Now, what else did the heroes of faith do?

IV. They found deliverance.

(Read Hebrews 11:33-34 again.) In these verses, we are reminded of some men who, by faith, found divine deliverance from their enemies. First, Paul mentions **Daniel**, who “*stopped the mouths of lions.*” Then he mentions **Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego**, who “*quenched the violence of fire.*” He doesn’t mention their names; but we know exactly who they are.

Who could possibly forget these stories of faith? Many of us have known these stories since we were toddlers. We love to read these stories, because they have “happy endings.” However, we often forget that these men did *not* know how their stories would end! *We* know how it ended; but *they* didn’t know how it would end. There came a morning in their lives when they awoke, and knew that before the day was over, they would have to make a decision either to honour God, or to deny Him. In Daniel’s case, the consequence of standing for God was to be cast into a den of starved, voracious lions. In Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego’s case, the consequence of standing for God was to be thrown alive into an inferno so hot, that even the guards who threw them into the furnace couldn’t withstand it. The guards burst into flames before they even came near the mouth of the furnace! Can you imagine what was going through their minds as they walked toward that fire? These men had to trust that the Lord was in control. They had to trust that no matter what happened to them, the God whom they obeyed and worshipped was *worth* dying an excruciatingly painful death! They had to trust that their God would give them the grace and strength to obey Him. Let’s look at the report of these men of faith, and try to put ourselves in their shoes.

Read Daniel 6:3-10.

Read Daniel 3:8-18.

What would *you* have done if you were in these situations, Christian? If you were in Daniel’s shoes, would you have simply prayed in private, where no one could see you, even though it would appear that your communion with God had been severed by an earthly power? If you were in Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego’s shoes, would you have simply bowed down to the statue, protesting all the time in your heart that you didn’t *really* believe in this false god, and that you weren’t *really* worshipping it? Or would you have stood alone for Jehovah, with the resolve that even if He *didn’t* choose to deliver you, you would not commit idolatry? True faith will stand for God, regardless of the consequences.

Now, Paul goes on to remind us of some believers who “*escaped the edge of the sword.*” Who would these people be? It could be any number of people! However, let’s look at a couple examples of deliverance in the life of **Elijah**, and compare them.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-9.

Read 2 Kings 1:1-16.

There is quite a difference in these two accounts of deliverance. In the one case, God did not clearly indicate to **Elijah** what he should do. So, he ran from Jezebel; and God providentially

led him to Mount Horeb, where He gave him forty days of rest and intensive spiritual training, in preparation for his next task. In the other case, **Elijah** stayed right where he was; and God turned his would-be captors into “crispy critters” just as they were ready to arrest him and lead him to execution. Sometimes God leads Christians to flee from persecution; and at other times, He leads them to stay right where they are. Either way, He can deliver His own, if He so choose; and He is in control. These men believed this truth with all their hearts. They clung to that truth; and they obtained a good report.

You may not think that there is much application of this truth in your life, Christian; but, believe me, you may be faced with these kinds of decisions in your lifetime, if the Lord do not rapture us out of here really soon! Persecution is coming. Imprisonment for sharing the Gospel is coming. Death for Jesus’ name may even be coming. Are you prepared to accept God’s deliverance, regardless of what form it may take?

Finally, in this passage, we find that through faith...

V. **They found strength in weakness.**

In the last part of **verse 34**, Paul points out yet another truth about these men of faith. It is a truth that, to the unsaved world, seems insane; but to believers, it is reality. Paul points out that “*out of weakness*” they “*were made strong.*”

This truth applies to every believer who ever walked by faith! God is able to use us when we acknowledge our own weakness, and simply trust in Him. In fact, God often *takes away* things that we might be tempted to lean upon, so that we may *know* that we are weak and helpless, and in need of Him. To the prophet **Zechariah** the LORD said, “*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts*” (**Zechariah 4:6**).

As Paul wrote these words, “*out of weakness were made strong,*” he was probably thinking of what the Lord Himself had once told him concerning a great limitation in his *own* life.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

This is the core of what faith really is. Faith is the realisation, and the humble acknowledgment, that you *need* the Lord. It is just the *opposite* of the attitude that Adam and Eve had when they ate the forbidden fruit. When they ate that fruit, they were really saying, “I don’t need you, God.” But *faith* says, “Lord, I need you.”

The famous English Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once wrote in a devotional:

“A primary qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God’s work well and triumphantly, is a sense of our own weakness. When God’s warrior marches forth to the battle, strong in his own might; when he boasts, “I know that I shall conquer: my own right arm and my conquering sword shall get me victory,” defeat is not far distant. Are you mourning over your own weakness? Take courage—for there must be a consciousness of weakness before the Lord will give thee victory.”

Are you going through dark times, Christian? Does it seem that you have nothing to hold you up through your trial? If so, be of good cheer. God routinely takes away earthly supports in order that we might realise our helplessness, and trust entirely on Him.

Did **Gideon** find strength in weakness? He surely did. Three hundred men with lamps, clay pitchers, and trumpets, *versus* an army of 120,000, are *not* good odds! Yet, God delivered them. Did **Jonathon** find strength in weakness? He surely did. In **1 Samuel 14**, we read about the time when Jonathan walked right into the camp of the Philistines, accompanied only by his armour-bearer. He told his armour-bearer, ***“It may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.”*** He really believed that! These two men then proceeded, by the supernatural power of God, to slaughter a score of the enemy. God then sent an earthquake, and caused the Philistines to become confused, and to kill each other. Finally, King Saul and the rest of the Israelite camp got wind of what was happening, and joined in the attack. That day, God gave great deliverance to Israel; and it was all because two men, by faith, found strength in weakness. By faith, Jonathon became one of those who ***“waxed valiant in fight,”*** and ***“turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”*** Did God *always* work this way? No. However, on this occasion, God revealed to Jonathon what He wanted him to do, in His own silent way; and Jonathan believed that God was able to do it, even though it looked impossible (and insane)!

Now, our mission today is *not* to engage in physical combat. Our mission is to be ***“witnesses”*** of Christ ***“both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*** Humanly speaking, this is an impossible task. All the Christians in this world combined are like a little flock of sheep compared to the 8 billion souls who are in Satan’s family. Furthermore, many of the richest and most powerful members of Satan’s family are doing all in their power to *stop* the Gospel; and all the power of hell is behind them. Yet, our mission is no less impossible than the mission that God gave to Jonathon. The Gospel is the ***“power of God unto salvation.”*** We have an all-powerful God on our side.

Many Christians today don’t fully believe that. Many Christians try to look, dress, and act like the world, so that maybe, just maybe, people will listen to a weak, soft, watered-down Gospel presentation. Much of our modern Western Christianity comes across like a desperate teenager that just wants to get a date, or who just wants to fit in with his peers. Instead of saying “Thus saith the Lord,” many churches are saying, ‘Oh, please like us, please!’” Brethren, is it our mission to make people “like us”? No! Is our mission to convince people that we are “nice guys”? No—because we are *not* “nice guys.” We are dirty, rotten sinners, who have been saved by God’s grace. Our mission is to preach the Gospel! All the power we need is in the words of this Book, and in the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. Are we small? We are. Are we weak? We surely are. However, God delights in showing His power through our weakness. Will you be like those men and women of old, and allow God to show His strength through your weakness, so that you may “obtain a good report” through faith?

Conclusion: “Report card day” is coming, Christian. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account, and to receive reward for what we’ve truly done for Him. How’s your report coming along? I’m not asking how talented you are. I’m asking, “Are you really walking by faith?” If so, God will enable you to stand before Him one day with a “good report.” I would also ask, “Are you saved?” The “report card” that we’re talking about today is not the thing that determines your salvation. The “report card” is what determines *rewards*; and it is only for those who are *already saved*. The only way

you can miss the judgment of hell, and spend eternity with God in Heaven, is to receive the salvation that Christ purchased for you. You must receive it by simple faith in Christ alone. The Bible says, ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”*** Won't you receive that gift today?