

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 29 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 (Part 2)

Hebrews 11:35-40

We live in a day of great apostasy. Greedy, voracious wolves, dressed in sheep's clothing, are working hard to enrich themselves in the name of Jesus Christ. Phonies like **Benny Hinn** are busy spreading a "prosperity gospel," which promises "health, wealth, healing, and miracles" if you will simply give to their "ministries." Phonies like **Joel Osteen**, who love their big name, enormous following, and lucrative book deals, pretend to preach the Gospel, yet deny that Jesus is the only way to Heaven when it is inconvenient to own His name. Phonies like **Rick Warren** go even farther in their apostasy. For years, Warren has been calling for a "world church," and a "world community." (Incidentally, Warren is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, which is dedicated to setting up a one-world government and religion.) This "evangelical" dismisses Christians who believe that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, and who are looking for the Second Coming of Jesus. He refers to them as old-fashioned fundamentalists with a "doom and gloom" theology. He says that they have no "solutions" to offer for the world's problems, and that they just want an "escape hatch" from the earth, rather than a "better world."

In sharp contrast to these "religious superstars" are the *real* men and women of God that we will be studying this morning. Many of these people lived and died in obscurity; and they didn't have the "good ending" stories to their lives. To all earthly appearances, they were the losers, and their enemies were the winners. However, God's record is radically different from man's record. In God's eyes, these people "obtained a good report." And how did they obtain it? *By faith.*

There is a choice that every believer must make every day: and that is the choice to "***deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow***" Christ (**Luke 9:23**). This doesn't mean that every believer will be called upon to suffer severe persecution and death; but it does mean that every day, every child of God should *die to self, and die to his own way*. Every believer should be totally surrendered to whatever God may have for him—even if it should mean great pain, and death. The cost for being a follower of Christ is high; but in the end, the believer who walks by faith obtains a "good report." That is what we will be talking about today, in this message which I have entitled ***Report Card Day (Part 2)***.

Read Hebrews 11:35-40.

From this passage, the first truth we see about these heroes of faith is that....

I. They chose to endure torture and death (vv. 35-37).

In **verse 35**, Paul points out that there are two different kinds of bodily resurrection. Both these resurrections are obtained *by faith*; but they have two very different purposes, and two very different ends. These two resurrections are a **temporal resurrection**, and **resurrection to immortality**. Before we can fully understand what Paul is saying about the torture and death that the heroes of faith had to endure, we need to understand these two resurrections.

First, let's talk first about the temporal resurrection. This resurrection is mentioned in the first part of **verse 35**. Paul reminds his audience of a time when, by faith, **“women received their dead raised to life again.”** There are two recorded times in the Old Testament when dead people were resurrected to life. There was the time when **Elijah** raised the widow of Zarephath's son; and there was the time when **Elisha** raised the Shunammite woman's son. Let's look at one of these examples--the story of the widow of Zarephath's son.

Read 1 Kings 17:17-24.

There are several things about this resurrection that we need to understand. First, **it wasn't through the boy's faith that this miracle took place.** The boy *couldn't* have exercised faith, because he was dead. It was *Elijah's* faith that God honoured. God revealed to Elijah that He was going to resurrect this boy; and by faith, Elijah allowed himself to be the instrument that God used. Secondly, **the boy was restored only to a temporal life.** “Temporal” simply means that it was only “for a time.” It wasn't permanent. Yes, the boy was raised back to life; but it was still a *mortal* life, just like the one he had had before. Eventually, this boy died again, and was buried; and he is still in the grave to this day.

With that in mind, let's talk about the resurrection to immortality. The resurrection to immortality is the **“better resurrection”** that Paul mentions at the end of **verse 35**. It is the kind of resurrection that God promises to *every* child of God in the future.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-57.

Why is the “better resurrection” *better* than the resurrection that the widow of Zarephath's son experienced? Well, let's compare them, and find out.

First, the “better resurrection” is better than the temporal resurrection because those who partake of it have placed *their own faith* in Jesus Christ. No one else can have faith for you, so that you may be saved! Jesus said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).** The widow of Zarephath's son was raised back to temporal life because of *someone else's* faith; but all the redeemed of all times will partake of the “better resurrection” because of their *own* faith.

Secondly, the “better resurrection” is *eternal* and *immortal*. The widow of Zarephath's son was raised back to life; but he died again. In contrast, those who partake of the “better resurrection” will *never* die again! Best of all, they will be raised to *sinless* immortality. On Resurrection Day, all the saved of all ages will be raised never to *die* again, and never to *sin* again! We will be *completely* conformed to Christ's image!

Read Romans 8:28-29.

In this passage, all the verbs that Paul uses are in the Greek *aorist* tense. This means that that these are actions which were *completed in the past*. What does this mean? It means that from the moment of salvation, the Christian is justified (“declared righteous”), **and glorified!** Just in case you were wondering, that word “glorified” means “resurrected.”

Wrap your head around that one, Christian! In God's eyes, your resurrection was already *accomplished* at the moment you were saved. God looks at your bodily resurrection as though it were a *past*, and not a future, event. As far as He is concerned, the resurrection might as well have already happened. *That* is how secure your salvation is! Receiving the "better resurrection" doesn't hinge upon *your* performance: rather, it rests upon *Christ's* finished work on the cross *for you!* He paid for your salvation in full; and you received that salvation by faith. The "better resurrection" *will* come to you! Your salvation, and everything that comes with it (including the resurrection of your body) is all a *done deal*. Now, let's return to **Hebrews 11:35**, and read it carefully. (**Read Hebrews 11:35.**) In the first part of the verse, Paul says that some women received their dead raised back to life again. Then, in contrast, he says that others were "***tortured, not accepting deliverance.***" He didn't merely say that "others died, and stayed dead"; he says that they were "***tortured, not accepting deliverance.***" And why? "***That they might obtain a better resurrection.***" The word "that" means "*in order that.*" Paul is saying that these believers were tortured and executed "*in order that*" they may obtain a better resurrection.

That's interesting, isn't it? Obviously, Paul isn't saying that you can't receive the "***better resurrection***" unless you've gone through persecution and torture. Going through torture isn't some kind of "merit" that *earns* you the "better resurrection": the resurrection is guaranteed to *every* believer, on the basis of *Christ's* resurrection! He already earned it! The point that Paul is making is that for some believers, going through torture and execution is something that *God wills* to take place *before* the Resurrection day.

To bring this into focus, let's look again at **Romans 8:28-30**. Remember when Paul said, "***and whom he did predestinate, them he also called***"? What "calling" is Paul talking about? He's talking about the call to salvation. However, the call to salvation isn't merely a call to escape hell, and to go to Heaven. The call to salvation is a *call to a life of submission and obedience*. Every aspect of your new life in Christ is included in that call. Simply put, God has your whole life mapped out, Christian! It's all pre-planned. Should He call you to go to a Muslim or communist country, or to some other dangerous place, to take the Gospel to lost souls, then that "call" is merely *part and parcel* of your salvation call! Should He call you to go across the street, or across town, to share the Gospel with someone, then that "call" is part of the salvation call. That witness to a lost soul is just one of the millions of purposes that He had for you when He called you to Himself! He knew that you would cross that lost person's path one day; and it was all part of His plan, and His "call." That is why He works "*all things*"—even seemingly bad things, such as torture and execution—"together for *good.*" Even if you *falter* at first, in the end, He *will* strengthen you, and enable you.

Remember **Peter**? When the prospect of death for the name of Christ arose, he denied His Lord three times. Yet, God turned it around for good, and used Peter as an example to all believers, to show us just how frail we really are. In the end, Peter stood firmly for his Lord, and died a martyr. **Balthasar Hubmaier**, one of the most influential leaders of the Baptists in central Europe in the early 1500's, was burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church on 10 March, 1528. Yet, in the months before his death, he had recanted his biblical teachings, as he was being tortured on the rack. Hubmaier failed his Saviour. However, His Saviour didn't fail him. By God's grace, Hubmaier repented of his sin, and embraced all the Bible teachings he had denied under duress. When the time came for his execution, one of the eyewitnesses remarked that he was "fixed like an immovable rock."

Now, let's look again at **verse 35**. (**Read Hebrews 11:35 again.**) Please notice what Paul said in the middle of **verse 35**. He says, *“and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance.”* The Greek word for “tortured” means “tortured by stretching on a frame, and beating to death” (much like the Medieval “rack”). There are at least a few people in Old Testament times (though not recorded in the Scriptures) who died in this specific manner. During the rule of the Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes, in 167 B.C., a Jewish priest named Eleazar, along with a Jewish woman and her seven sons, were commanded to eat swine flesh, or be tortured and executed. Of course, eating swine's flesh was against the Law of Moses; and they all refused to obey. Because of this, they were all stretched on a rack, beaten, mutilated, and killed. However, before their deaths, all of them proclaimed their hope in the future resurrection. One of the seven sons told Antiochus, “It is good to die at the hands of men, and to look for the hopes that are given by God, that we shall be raised again by Him.”

Of course, torture on the rack wasn't the only fate that Old Testament believers met with. Paul says that some believers were *“stoned,” “sawn asunder,” “tempted,”* and *“slain with the sword.”* (**Read verse 37 again.**) Do we have any records of these things? Yes, we do. According to historical records, the prophet **Jeremiah** was stoned to death by his own people, in the land of Egypt, for daring to tell them that God had destroyed Jerusalem and Judah, and scattered them abroad, because of their sin. In **2 Chronicles 24**, we are told that the faithful priest **Zechariah**, who cried against the idolatry of King Joash and the princes of Israel, was stoned to death in the Temple. History also informs us that during the reign of the wicked King Manasseh, the prophet **Isaiah** was placed inside a hollow log, and sawn in half. As for being *“slain with the sword”*—countless believers met this fate. One such man was **Urijah**, a prophet in the time of Jeremiah, who was slain by King Jehoiakim for prophesying that God would destroy Jerusalem because of their sin.

Of course, we could look at many more examples in the *New Testament*. **Stephen** was stoned. Eleven of the twelve apostles, and countless Christians whose names we won't know until we get to Heaven, were killed. The very word **“martyr”** comes from the Greek word *martur*, which simply means “witness.” So many of Christ's “witnesses” were killed for Christ's name, that the very word “witness” came to mean “someone who dies for Christ”!

What is the upshot of all this? Well, I think Paul put it very well in **Romans 14:8**, when he said, *“For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.”* By faith, some believers live long lives, and die in peace; and by faith, others die prematurely and violently. However, all who are in Christ have the sure hope of a “better resurrection.” Whatever suffering we must go through *before* that day is the Lord's choosing; but until then, we must obey to His calling.

The heroes of faith choose to endure torture and death, if necessary. Secondly...

II. They chose to endure ridicule and humiliation (v. 36).

(**Read verse 36 again.**) According to this verse, many heroes of faith had *“trial of cruel mockings and scourgings,”* as well as *“bonds and imprisonment.”* To whom was Paul referring? He could have been referring to *many* people! Mockery and scorn have *always* been the lot of God's servants. **Scourging** was the lot of the prophet **Jeremiah**, and of many

others. **Bonds and imprisonment** was the lot of many, as well. There was **Joseph**, who spent years in prison for a crime he didn't commit. There was the prophet **Micaiah**, who dared to prophesy to King Ahab that he would be killed in battle, because of his rebellion against the Lord. There was the prophet **Hanani**, who prophesied against King Asa for making a league with the pagan king of Syria. There was **Jeremiah**, who was imprisoned by King Zedekiah for prophesying that God would destroy Judah for her sin. Let's take a closer look at Jeremiah's story.

Read Jeremiah 38:4-13.

Probably few things are as humiliating as the feeling of being treated like a criminal. I remember when my brother-in-law was wrongly arrested because a car rental place had mistakenly reported him to the authorities for driving a stolen vehicle. He has never forgotten the feeling of humiliation that he experienced when the officers pulled up to his house, pointed a gun at him, made him kneel down with his hands behind his head, handcuffed him, put him in the police car, and took him to the police station to be booked. Many Christians around the world are, at this very moment, experiencing this same feeling as they are arrested for preaching the Gospel. You may be sure that such things will come to us Christians in the West, too, unless the Rapture happens very soon. For more than a decade now, the Department of Homeland Security has included Bible-believing Christians who oppose abortion and gay marriage, and who believe in a Rapture and a literal second coming of Jesus Christ, as "potential domestic terrorists," who should be spied upon by the government. If you think that we aren't on similar government spy lists here in Europe, you'd better think again!

Are you ready to embrace ridicule and imprisonment for your Saviour, Christian? Are you determined to "obtain a good report" through faith, even if the Lord should will for you to go through such a trial? Will you follow the example of men like the Apostle Paul?

Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-16.

The heroes of old chose to endure torture and death. They chose to endure ridicule and humiliation. Thirdly...

III. They chose to embrace poverty and expulsion from society (vv. 37-38).

(Read Hebrews 11:37-38 again.) Many believers of old had to choose poverty and expulsion from society because of their faith in the true God. Paul gives, as an example, the prophets of old, who "*wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins.*"

Do we have any examples of such people? Yes, we do. The prophet Elijah was one of them. When we think of Elijah, we often picture him as wearing rough animal skins, and a leather girdle. According to **2 Kings 1:8**, he was well-known for this appearance. Why did he look this way? Was he trying to create a "wild-man" appearance for himself, in order to add to his "prophet" mystique? No! He dressed this way because he was a poor, hunted fugitive, and literally had nothing else to wear! Such was the case with many of the prophets. Many of them were "*destitute, afflicted,*" and "*tormented.*" Many of them had to resort to living in caves. During the reign of King Ahab, **Obadiah**, a servant of the king, was secretly hiding and feeding 100 prophets of God in a cave. During the reign of **Antiochus Epiphanes**,

Antiochus went into the Temple, set up an image of himself in the holy of holies, and demanded to be worshipped as God, on penalty of death. Faithful Jewish believers had to flee from this satanic man, and hide in caves; and they had time to grab only bare necessities. By the way, Jewish believers during the Tribulation will be forced to do this same thing after the Antichrist goes into the Temple, sets up an image, declares himself “God,” and demands to be worshipped, on pain of death! That is why Jesus warned these future believers that when the “abomination of desolation” is set up, they are not even to grab their clothes, but to *run!*

Countless believers through the centuries have had to run for their lives; and countless more will have to do so. In the world’s eyes, they are scum. However, God sees them very differently. As Paul said, it is *the world* that is “**not worthy**” of these believers. These believers certainly were not sinless; but they did love and trust God, and endeavoured to serve the King with all their might. Christian, would *you* be willing to endure poverty and expulsion from society, if necessary? Jesus promised that “**in the world ye shall have tribulation.**” However, He also promised, “**but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.**”

The heroes of faith chose to endure torture and death. They chose to endure ridicule and humiliation. They chose to embrace poverty, and expulsion from society. Lastly...

IV. They chose to embrace a yet-unfulfilled promise.

(Read Hebrews 11:39-40.) At the end of the day, what did these heroes’ faith get them? What promise did they obtain? Well, they obtained *some* of the promises that God gives to believers in *this* life (such as comfort, guidance, protection, etc.); but they never saw ***the*** promise come to fruition in their lifetimes. What promise was that? **The promise of Christ’s coming to earth, and His purchasing of our salvation!**

That’s why Paul goes on to say that God has provided some “***better thing for us.***” Christ’s once-for-all purchase of our salvation is that “better thing.” Paul also says, “***that they without us should not be made perfect.***” What does that mean? Paul is saying that they (the Old Testament saints) will not be made perfect *without us* (the New Testament saints). In other words, one day, both the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints will receive the resurrection of their bodies *together*. Let’s look at one more Scripture this morning.

Read Hebrews 12:22-24.

As we speak, there is a “general assembly” of New Testament saints in Heaven, who are worshipping Jesus around His throne. Meanwhile, the “church of the firstborn” is assembled here on earth, in this room, and in many other assemblies around the world. However, even though we are here on earth, our *names* are written in Heaven. In God’s mind, we are as good as already there. Also, the “***spirits of just men made perfect***” (the Old Testament saints) are assembled in Heaven, as well. Those who are already in Heaven have obtained their “***good report***” through faith, and are still awaiting the “***better resurrection.***” We believers here on earth are awaiting the Resurrection Day, as well; however, *our* “report” is not yet complete. Christian, will you, by faith, strive to obtain that “good report,” so that you can stand before your Saviour with joy?

We have heard much about the “good report” of Old Testament saints; but before we wrap up our study of **Hebrews 11**, I would like to tell you about the “good report” of a couple named Joe and Tanna Collins. Joe Collins grew up in a dysfunctional home, in which he knew nothing of an earthly father, much less of the heavenly Father. When he was 14, he “walked the aisle” of a professing Baptist church; but he still was not truly saved. He simply didn’t understand salvation. However, that all changed on 5 June, 1983, when he attended a true, Bible-centred, Gospel-preaching Baptist church. The church was alive with God’s presence and power. That morning, he was powerfully convicted by the message, and finally understood that Jesus died and rose again for him; and he asked Christ to be his Saviour. Shortly after this, he began to court the pastor’s daughter, Tanna. (In fact, Tanna was the one who invited him to church in the first place!) They were married, and went to Tabernacle Bible Baptist College to prepare for the ministry. However, Tanna was *not* happy when Joe told her that he believed that God wanted them to take the Gospel to the Tibetan people of Nepal. In her heart, she made all kinds of objections. She thought, “I can’t go there. I can’t take my children there; that’s the devil’s country. I might die there. My children might die there.” However, every time she made an objection, the Lord reminded her of a verse from the book of **Philippians**. When she said, “If I go there, I might have to suffer,” the book of **Philippians** said, “*And in nothing be terrified by your adversaries.*” When she said, “How do I know this is your leading?” **Philippians** said, “*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*” When she said, “What about the bad living conditions over there?” **Philippians** said, “*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*” When she said, “I would find it difficult to learn a new language and culture,” **Philippians** said, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*” When she said, “What is medical attention was needed, or other emergencies would come up?” **Philippians** said, “*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” When she said, “I don’t think I could be happy over there. The isolation would get to me,” **Philippians** said, “*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.*”¹

Well, Joe and Tanna obeyed God; and in 1990, they arrived in Katmandu, Nepal. The living conditions, and the language, were very difficult; and the demonic oppression surrounding the Buddhist temple was intense. Yet, in two years’ time, Joe not only learned the language, but was preaching in it! The Collins home was constantly open to their neighbours; and despite the fact that establishing churches was against the law, a church naturally formed in their home, as people were saved and discipled. This was the first Baptist church *ever* established among the Tibetans; and already, a Tibetan man was being seriously trained for the ministry.

But then, there came that fateful day of 31 July, 1992. Joe and Tanna and their 5 children were flying to Thailand to take their first “break,” and to visit some missionary friends there; but as they were flying through the Himalayas, their plane slammed into a mountain, and everyone onboard died. Tanna’s old fear of “dying in Nepal” actually came true. Yet, was it in vain? Not at all! Through their loving testimony, a small group of Tibetan believers had been delivered from intense spiritual darkness; and someday, those precious souls will stand together with Joe and Tanna, and with all of us who are in Christ, to receive our “report card.”

Conclusion: Apostates and hypocrites have their reward here on earth. They have worldly things, security, and the praise of men. However, that is all they will get. The minute they depart this life, they will enter the Lake of Fire. In contrast, those who are in Christ experience *scorn and rejection* here on

¹ Clifford E. Clark, *Drama in the Real Lives of Missionaries* (Milford, OH: John the Baptist Printing Ministry, p. 26.

earth; and they must often suffer persecution and death, as well. Yet, report card day is coming! One day the Father will say, ***“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”*** Is this your fondest desire, Christian? If it isn't, *start making* it your fondest desire! Live by faith, so that you might obtain a “good report”!

In closing, I would ask: “Are you saved?” If you have not truly repented of your sin, and placed your complete faith in Jesus to save you, you will never even see that glorious 1,000-year Kingdom of Christ on earth, much less enter into the pearly gates of New Jerusalem. Won't you answer His call today?