

Hebrews 11:32-40 // Don't Waste Your Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 May 2026

Preacher: Andrew MacKenzie

[0 : 00] Verses 1 and 2. Now faith is the confidence in what we hope for, Conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised.

Who shut the mouths of lions, 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.

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released, so that they might gain an even better resurrection.

Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were sawn in two.

They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and ill-treated. The world was not worthy of them.

[1 : 36] They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes and in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Well, thanks, Rona. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to expand on all of this, but we've got 28 minutes, and we'll dive in together. If you've not met before, my name's Andrew.

I'm a leader in training here in the church. It is my great joy to be helping us think about this last bit of Hebrews 11 together. As we come before God's word, join with me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we praise you that you are the gods of Abel, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

And you are our God too. Thank you that because you are the same, we have much to learn from your word about your dealings with your people long ago. And so we pray as we look at your word together now, that by your spirit you'd be working through my words and in all of our hearts to accomplish all that you have willed for us this evening.

[3 : 04] In Jesus' name, amen. I wonder what you would consider to be a wasted life. What might cause you at the end of your life or of somebody else's life to look back and go, what a waste.

They could have done so much more. Maybe in our world we think of someone with this great talent. They could have been a great musician, a great athlete, but they never actually had the discipline to train, to practice, and so they just lived their life in mediocrity.

Maybe we think of someone so dedicated to their work that they think that their employers really value them, but actually they couldn't care less. And year after year goes by, and they don't use their weeks of annual leave.

They're stuck in the office working 12-hour days, six days a week, and they never get out to enjoy the good creation that we have. What a waste.

Or maybe as Christians, we'd think a little bit differently. Maybe we'd think of someone who worked really hard to get to the top of their profession, to be able to have influence in our culture.

[4 : 18] And the first issue that comes up that they're maybe not quite sure about, is that really what God thinks? They decide to take a big stand, and they get bootied out. No one wants to hear from them again.

And we think, if only they'd lasted longer. Or the exact opposite. We think of someone who worked really hard to get into the halls of power, really hard to be able to influence.

An issue comes, an issue goes, and they never seem to do anything to try and tell people about the Lord, to influence the world and make Him known.

What a waste. If only once they didn't hold their mouth, but spoke instead. But what we see tonight in our passage is that every time, a life that's lived by faith is never a waste.

A life that boots Jesus right at the center is never, ever wasted. We can play it short, we can play it long, but when we live in faith, that is what the Lord has in store for us.

[5 : 20] We've been spending our time in the book of Hebrews the last few weeks in Hebrews 11, and we've been going at this leisurely pace, wandering through some characters from the first six books of the Bible, thinking about how they all lived by faith in relationship with God.

But now the pace picks up. We get six names and just all the prophets name-dropped as one, and we get these two big lists of things that happened.

And it's written to Jewish Christians who are wondering, is it really worth keeping going? Should I really keep on going when it makes my life harder? What if I just go back a little bit?

What if I just make some compromises? Would that be easier? Is this by faith in what I do not see? Is this really worth it? But they must keep going by faith.

We must keep going by faith. That is our encouragement tonight, and so let's dive right in. It's helpful if you have your Bibles open at page 1210, and if you've got a service sheet in the way, and you'll find our three points for this evening on the back.

[6 : 31] Our first point, then sometimes faith conquers. That's verses 32 to 35a. Sometimes faith conquers. Read with me verse 32.

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah about David and Samuel and the prophets. He's limiting himself now to six people.

We have four judges, King David and Samuel, who was a prophet, a priest, and a judge, and then all the prophets as well.

And it's difficult to know quite how much to say here, because he gives us these names, and it's hard to know what should come into our minds. I don't know how good your judges' knowledge is.

Take that. For example, maybe you've never read the book. Maybe there's someone here who's got a PhD on judges. If there are, ask them your questions afterwards. But I'm guessing that our knowledge isn't quite as good as first century Jewish Christians would be.

[7 : 36] Here the writer can write these names, and instantly to mind would probably come all the big events in that person's life. And so let's do a quick highlights reel, just so that we can kind of get up to speed and think about what's going on.

Gideon, well, by faith, he had 32,000 men ready to fight, and the Lord told him, take that down to 300. That's who you'll fight the Midianites with.

So by faith, he went out with 300 men and absolutely defeated the Midianites who were oppressing God's people, forcing them to flee. Samson, well, by faith, he gave his life to free God's people.

When he was in the temple with the Philistine rulers, he crushed the temple pillars, causing the whole building to come falling down on them. And Barak and Jephthah, well, they both took up the fight by faith, going out and freeing God's people from their slavery to other nations.

It's not to mention King David who united the people, who gave them rest. It's not to mention Samuel, who after the chaos and the wickedness of the days of the judges brought order and stability.

[8 : 53] These are all great heroes who lived by faith and conquered in this world. As we get lots of examples of their conquering, glance down to verse 33 with me.

Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised. Who shut the mouths of lions, 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. Women received back their dead to life again.

By faith, they conquered. And we have nine examples of conquering, and I think they're roughly three sets of three. Three great triumphs, three great deliverances, and three great empowerments. By faith, God's people conquered kingdoms. A bunch of runaway slaves leaving Egypt, ill-equipped, outnumbered, marched into the promised land, and in judges, they continued to kick people out of winning battles.

[10 : 07] By faith, they ruled with justice. Think of Solomon and his great wisdom, bringing justice in difficult matters. By faith, they gained earthly promises.

They gained land, rest, relationship with God. By faith, they triumphed. By faith, we triumph. The world calls us to pack it all in and be more like them.

By faith, we keep on going, knowing that that is not what our lives are for. By faith, they were delivered. Think of Daniel in the den of lions.

By faith, the mouth of the lions were shot, and he survived. Or think of Daniel's friends thrown into the great incinerator, as hot as it could be.

By faith, the fire and the fury of the flames were quenched. Or Gideon's men, who escaped the mouth of the sword, 300 against many thousands, driving them out.

[11:10] By faith, acting, knowing God's promises. They were delivered. And we too are delivered. We need no fear of what the world might do to us here, what might happen in our lives today.

Because by faith, we know there is an eternity coming, that though we do not see it now, we know that it will be so. By faith, they were empowered.

When Samson had been shaved, when he was weak. By faith, he knew the Lord would empower him to kill the oppressors of Israel. And he collapsed that temple.

By faith, our judges that we read about went out and conquered foreign armies. They routed them in battle, despite their great seeming disadvantages.

By faith, Elijah and Elisha raised back sons. To widows in this world. Resurrected them. And by faith, we are empowered to live, as God calls us to do.

[12:15] By faith, we are empowered to go out and share the gospel. To seek to make Christ known in this land. But at this point, you might think, and it would be fair to ask, come on, Andrew, that's not the same kind of thing.

They were the great heroes of the Old Testament. It's not the same as me and you. Is it really the same faith? But these characters are being held up for us in Hebrews as encouragements to be like them, as encouragements to keep on going.

You might think, you don't know what's happening in my life. You don't know the failure I am, my background, my struggles. You don't know what I'm going through right now. But these judges that we are given had great moments of failure as well.

If you were going to have the best four judges to encourage people to keep on going, you probably wouldn't pick these four. Othniel and Ehud are like the brand standard judges.

They're the guys that you want. And from then, everything just gets worse and worse. These judges have immense moments of foolishness.

[13:26] Gideon, well, after his great battle, what does he do? Well, he goes and leads all of Israel into idolatry. He says, let's make an idol and worship that instead.

Barak, well, he to a lesser extent, but he shows cowardice. And when called to go, he is disobedient and requires Deborah to come with him as well. Samson, well, I mean, you just have to read a little bit of his life to figure out that he is an impulsive, sex-obsessed man who does not take people saying no to him well.

He was disobedient in all that the Lord called him to do with his Nazarite vow. Jephthah, well, he made a foolish vow. And then when he got back from his great battle, decided to sacrifice his daughter, thinking that's how he should respond.

These judges were not perfect people, and yet by faith, the Lord used them. And living by faith is not about being perfect. It's not about what we can do.

No, as we saw earlier in Hebrews, living by faith is knowing that our sins are covered in Jesus' blood. It's knowing that our one hope in the resurrection is knowing that Christ has paid for our sin, and it is only by him that we can ever be in relationship with God.

[14:56] Sometimes faith conquers in this world. And the gospel makes no excuse for the failures and horrendous things the judges did.

The gospel of God condemns the sin, but liberates the sinner. It says Christ has paid for our sin on that cross.

And so we are free to live by faith, and sometimes faith conquers. Where we step out in faith, where we know that our eternity is secure in God and say, I don't know what will happen here, but I trust that sometimes faith conquers in this world.

Throughout time, God has used flawed, sinful men and women like you and I to achieve great things in this world. And do you really have space for that in your mind?

Do you really believe that sometimes the Lord does great things in this world? That by the ordinary acts of faithful believers, who knows what he might do? He might claim your family for his own, your workplace for his own.

[16:06] He might make his name known in your neighborhood, in our country, in our world. Sometimes faith conquers, and we really must believe it. But also sometimes faith suffers.

We've seen the glorious things of all done. And our passage hinges now to sometimes faith suffers, our second point, verses 35b to 38.

Our passage hinges on the two different types of resurrection we get. Look down at 35b with me just now. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released, so that they might, sorry, there were others who were tortured, refusing to be released, so that they might gain an even better resurrection.

Two kinds of resurrection. Some were raised in this life. Others, while tortured, refused to renounce the Lord, knowing that in this life, they could walk away scot-free.

They just said, I don't know the God of Israel. I don't have anything to do with him. But by faith, they continued going. And some of us just now will know that truth all too well.

[17:23] By faith, sometimes we suffer in this world. It's a reality of living here. It's a reality of being part of God's people. But as Christians, we have the hope of the resurrection.

It is critical to our lives as Christians. It's the right at the center of the Christian faith, the hope of the coming resurrection of Christ.

And he will bring us home. At the start of the chapter, back in verse one, we heard, now faith is the confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

We do not see the resurrection right now, but we know that it is coming. And we know that we have deep assurance that whatever happens here on earth, those of us that are in Christ cannot have that future taken from us.

That is the brilliant hope of the resurrection. And so let's dive into these examples of suffering we get. 36 and 37. Glance down with me. Some faced jeers and floggings.

[18:29] And even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were sawn in two. They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and ill-treated.

Went through all manner of horrible things by faith. Suffered greatly. Again, I think we get three sets. They were abused. They were killed.

They were impoverished. Samson, when he was captured by the Philistines, had his eyes gouged out. He was chained and imprisoned and booked to work.

He was made fun of. By faith, Christians are jeered all over the world. How do you really still believe that? Do you know it's been ages and he's still not come back?

What are you spending your life on? What a waste. And by faith, they suffer knowing that the resurrection is true. Or consider Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24, who, when he sees the wickedness of God's people in the temple, he stands up to be counted and he says, stop.

[19:42] Don't you see what you're doing is wrong? The Lord will punish you for your wickedness. And do you know what God's people do? Under the orders of their king, they turn right round and stone him right there, right then to death.

He stood up to be counted. He decided this is the moment that by faith, I will say something. And God's people stoned him straight to death. And today, by faith, our brothers and sisters in Nigeria, if not every day, then most days keep on going out.

They share the gospel. They hope that many will turn from false religions to the saving hope of knowing the Lord. And they keep on going.

Their friends are martyred, they are abused, they are impoverished. But because they know that their resurrection is true and nothing can take it, they keep on going, knowing that sometimes faith suffers.

Or consider the exiles who faithfully returned at the end of the exile. They came back to Jerusalem, a city with no walls.

[20:55] They had no security. A city with no economy. They were impoverished. A city that was surrounded by enemies who wanted to stop their work at every chance they could get.

And yet by faith, they left and they went back according to the word of the Lord. They kept on going, not without hitches, not without wobbles, but knowing what was true, that the Lord was good and the king of all, they got on with the task the Lord had put in front of them, suffering by faith.

And here is an incredible truth from verse 38. Glance down with me. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in halls of the ground.

The world was not worthy of these great Old Testament heroes. They should have been boot right in the center of the city. They should have been listened to for bringing the word of God and the gospel.

Instead, they were kicked out of the public square. Will you just shut up about that Jesus stuff? Just shut up about the God of Israel. We don't want to hear it anymore.

[22 : 11] There's no place for that today. We don't know what you're doing, but we don't want a part of it. The world was not worthy of them. And yet by faith, they suffered, knowing what was to come.

And if the world was not worthy of them, let us consider Christ. Surely the world was not worthy of him either.

He, thinking little of the riches he had in heaven, came down to live a life here, suffering much for the sake of us.

He was jeered, flogged, chained, imprisoned, tortured. He was hung on a cross. Truly, foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head.

Thinking little of himself, he gave it all up. He was born in the squalor of a borrowed stable. Through the kisses of a friend's betrayal, he was hung on a cruel cross.

[23 : 24] He fights for breath. He fights for me, loosing sinners from the claims of hell. He went through great suffering on this earth to redeem us.

And so by faith, we are called to follow him. And so sometimes faith suffers. And a big question for us tonight is do we get that?

Do we really believe that by faith we may well be called to suffer in this life? Do you really believe that it would be worth it to give up everything you have in this world?

Your safety, your comfort, your possessions, your career, your relationships, whatever it might be, for the sake of making Christ known? Do we really deep down believe that that is what God might call us to do?

And by faith, would we follow? Well, I think only if we keep our eyes on that coming glorious resurrection that Christ has won for us.

[24 : 28] Our third point this evening, every time, a life by faith is not a waste. Verses 39 and 40. Sometimes faith conquers, sometimes faith suffers by no means an exclusive thing, it's not one or the other.

Two very different outcomes here on earth and yet the same outcome into eternity. It's not what you've done, it's not what you've achieved, it's not your legacy you've left behind on this earth. But it's their faith that they are commended for. Look down at verse 39 with me. These were all commended for their faith. Across Bible history, all that we've mentioned tonight and many more, Hebrews 11 could be many times longer than it is.

All were commended for their faith. And here is a staggering thing. Verse 39 continues, yet not one of them, yet sorry, yet none of them received what had been promised.

since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Right now, these great heroes of the Old Testament faith are waiting for us.

[25 : 43] They are waiting for Christ to return and to give them that promised resurrection into the new creation with us. None of them have yet received that promised resurrection.

They knew that God would do something better. They didn't know it all but we want to say they knew something of it. And they are waiting just now. Back in verse 33, it said that they had gained promises and here we're told that none of them have yet received word promised.

Verse 33 is talking about the earthly promises and blessings of God, the land itself, relationship with God, the rest in the land. But the greater eternal promises, they are waiting for Christ to come again.

it's not because it's not coming but because God had something better planned and in his good timing Christ will appear again.

And if we really treasure that our resurrection is assured in him that it is unshakable, then that really helps us take risks for the kingdom. It helps us realize that we can live this life by faith knowing that sometimes we conquer, sometimes we suffer, but whatever happens we will be into eternity with the Lord.

[27 : 04] This letter is written to Christians suffering and persecuting, persecuted, wondering is it really worth keeping on going? Is this really what I'm supposed to use my life for?

Isn't this a bit of a waste? Being rejected, being shut out of society? Well, what is a waste of a life? A waste of a life is one that does not live by faith. Better to have lived a life of faith and die tomorrow than to live 20 years longer and not live by faith and boot Christ right at the very heart of it.

Perhaps we're tempted to think the same as the Christians back then. Is it really worth me living a bold life by faith? Is it really worth going into the office on Monday morning and trying to share about my Sunday with God's people hearing from God's word when it just feels like none of them want to know anything about it?

Why keep on going? Is it really worth speaking of him and trying to battle against these winds of culture that just keep battering me back? Is it really all worth it?

[28 : 13] And I've been prepping this this week. I've been challenged on maybe I'm too defeatist about what will happen in this life. Do I really believe that by faith God does use his ordinary people like you and I to achieve great things in this world?

Do I think too much of the suffering and be a far too defeatist on the prospect that God might really call my friends to have faith in him, my family, my loved ones?

I wonder if sometimes we're just a bit too negative about the outcomes of that. But if we believe in the assurance of our resurrection with him, we can live a life all about Jesus.

The world might say, what a waste, what on earth are you doing? But we say every time a life by faith is never ever a waste. And this goes well beyond evangelism into the other priorities of our lives.

by faith some are called to be missionaries and they go off to countries that it's far less safe to be a Christian. They know that they might never see their homeland again and they go to help our brothers and sisters to make Christ known, knowing that that is not a waste of their life for they have eternity ahead of them.

[29 : 35] By faith some move their entire families, they uproot and they go to different parts of the country, parts where the country is more deprived, maybe schemes or somewhere else and go I'm really going to commit to the gospel work there.

I'm going to move as a family it might not feel as safe as the leafy west end but we will go and we will support. And people say what a waste of all the opportunities you have to raise your children there, to live your life in better places.

But they say this is not a waste. I know that by faith I have great work to do here. And I will have all eternity to enjoy. By faith others choose not to make big changes.

They go I would love a quiet life in the countryside an easy life somewhere else but I see the value of being committed to a church in the city. I see that as city churches have big turnovers there's real value in staying and being committed and serving in that ministry.

And so they continue in a city when the leafy calls of the countryside are very appealing knowing that long-term investment there is not a waste of a life.

[30 : 48] Others decide not to move that even though their church has no people their age even though it would be much more comfortable to go down the road where relationships are easier they decide to stay and they go I will invest in intergenerational ministry.

I will invest in getting to know people and try and get more people my age along. They know that in five years the Lord might revive that church.

They know that in five years the Lord might close that church. But in five years time either way the work is not a waste. By faith they have lived and they know that they have the whole of eternity ahead of them.

And so how do we know what to do to live? By faith when do you go? When do you stay? When do you speak up? When do you keep quiet? When do you move?

Where do you stay? Well God's unlikely to specifically tell us but by faith we have many great options in front of us and with the wisdom he has given us and other brothers and sisters in Christ and in our prayerfulness we're free to live a life that sometimes conquers sometimes suffers knowing that every time a life by faith is not a waste.

[32 : 05] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father what reassurance it is to know that whatever happens in this life our future is absolutely certain thanks to the saving work of Christ redeeming us from the curse of sin and bringing us before you now to one day be resurrected into the new creation help us to live our lives by faith being bold in this world knowing that even if we sacrifice everything a life by faith is never ever a waste in Jesus name amen well the band are going to come up and we'll sing in response to God's word after which we'll take communion together you