



# WHEN FAITH SEEMS TO FAIL

Preaching and Teaching Resources

ADRIAN ROGERS





# When Faith Seems to Fail

ADRIAN ROGERS

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide this transcript produced from a live sermon preached by Adrian Rogers while serving as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. This transcript is intended for your personal, non-commercial use.

**Note: Though it has been transcribed from a version used for broadcast, it may contain stutters, stammers, and other authentic remarks as would be common in a live setting.**

In order to ensure our ability to be good stewards of Adrian Rogers' messages, Love Worth Finding has reserved all rights to this content.

Except for your personal, non-commercial use and except for brief quotations in printed reviews, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—without the prior permission of the publisher.

Copyright © 2022 Love Worth Finding Ministries, Inc.

Transcripts are used by permission of the Rogers Family Trust.



# When Faith Seems to Fail

**SERMON REFERENCE:** Hebrews 11:32-39

**LWF SERMON NUMBER:** #2410

In this life, we will experience situations in which we've tried to trust in God and our faith seems to fail. What do we do when we face trials, tribulations, or heartaches, and faith doesn't seem to remove them?

Hebrews 11 gives us insight for those who struggle to endure when times get tough. First, this passage reminds us that mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God. "...who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong..." (Hebrews 11:33-34).

## **Mature believers know that God can do anything but fail.**

Anyone who has walked with Jesus for a long time has had an experience that can't be explained apart from His power. When reminded of the numerous miracles of God, we can be comforted to know that if God does not do something, it is not because He cannot.

## **Second, mature faith bows to the sovereign purposes of God.**

"Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35).

Sometimes, God's ways are mysterious, but that doesn't mean they're weak. Many of the early Christians were martyred for their faith; many Christians around the world still are.

God has not promised a life without difficulty. He has simply promised Himself. He will never leave or forsake us, especially when we face difficulty. We must hold onto the promise that, through Him, we have the ultimate victory over death.

## **Finally, mature faith is based on the settled promises of God.**

"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

When faith seems to fail, it may be that we are asking for something that God never intended for us. We must remember that God has a wonderful plan, and He will bring it to pass. We can depend on His steadfast, eternal promises from Scripture.

Adrian Rogers says, "Real faith is to center your life on Almighty God."

## **Life Application**

Do you have the faith to endure trials and heartaches? Are you willing to let God be God, and to trust Him even when things don't make sense?



# When Faith Seems to Fail

**SERMON REFERENCE:** Hebrews 11:32-39

**LWF SERMON NUMBER:** #2410

## 1) INTRODUCTION

- a) You cannot live the Christian life apart from faith.
  - i) The Bible says we live by faith.
  - ii) Matthew 9:29
  - iii) Hebrews 11:6
- b) Not only do we need to possess faith, we need a faith that possesses us.
- c) What happens when faith seems to fail?
- d) Sometimes we pray for specific things, and just the opposite happens.
  - i) We try to believe.
  - ii) We try to trust.
  - iii) And yet, faith seems to fail.
  - iv) Times come when the answer does not come exactly as we think that it ought.
  - v) Sometimes trials, temptations, tribulations, heartaches, tears and fears come and faith does not seem to remove them.
- e) Hebrews 11 was written because there were some who were ready to throw in the towel.
  - i) They had been serving the Lord through great persecution.
  - ii) Hebrews 10:36
    - (1) We need to learn to endure.
- f) Hebrews 11:32-39
  - i) Some escaped by faith.
  - ii) Some endured by faith.
- g) Some Christians have faith in the good times, but let some crisis come and they quit.
  - i) They have an immature faith; a superstitious faith.

## 2) MATURE FAITH BELIEVES IN THE SUPERNATURAL POWER OF GOD

- a) If God does not do it, it is not because He cannot.
- b) Hebrews 11:32-35
  - i) All of these are stories of supernatural deliverance.
  - ii) Danial in the lion's den
    - (1) They told Daniel not to pray or they would throw him in the lion's den.
    - (2) He prayed anyway and they threw him in the lion's den and God shut the mouths of the lions.
  - iii) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
    - (1) They were told to bow to a pagan idol or they would be tossed into a fiery furnace.
    - (2) When they refused to bow down, they were tossed into the fiery furnace.
      - (a) They would not bow, they would not budge but they would not burn.
    - (3) When the king looked in, he saw four men standing in the fire and said, "The fourth is like the Son of God."
      - (a) Daniel 3:27
  - iv) David
    - (1) David slew Goliath
    - (2) Everyone was afraid of Goliath, except for David.
    - (3) 1 Samuel 16:12



- (4) When others thought Goliath was too big to hit; David thought he was too big to miss.
  - (a) Others thought, "Look how much bigger Goliath is than we are."
  - (b) David thought, "Look how much smaller Goliath is than God is."
  - (c) God gave David the victory over the giant.
- v) Simon Peter
  - (1) He was cast into prison by wicked king Herod.
  - (2) An angel comes and breaks him out of the jail.
  - (3) Peter has more trouble getting into a prayer meeting than he did getting out of jail.
- c) Anyone who has walked with Jesus for a time, has a story where God miraculously, supernaturally, inexplicably worked in your heart and life in a way that cannot be explained apart from God.
  - i) Mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God.
  - ii) Do not ever say that there is something that God cannot do.
    - (1) God can do anything, but fail.

### 3) MATURE FAITH BOWS TO THE SOVEREIGN PURPOSES OF GOD

- a) Sometimes God's ways are mysterious, but that does not mean they are weak.
- b) We love exciting victories, but sometimes they don't come.
  - i) Zechariah the prophet was stoned to death.
  - ii) Stephen was stoned to death.
  - iii) Isaiah was sawn asunder; placed in a hollow tree by king Manasseh and cut in half.
  - iv) Early Christians were often made fun of and tortured for sport.
    - (1) Some were dressed in animal skins and sent out to be hunted by dogs.
    - (2) Some were fed to lions in the Coliseum or the Circus Maximus.
    - (3) These early Christians sealed their faith with their lives.
  - v) The Book of Martyr's
    - (1) Christians were sown in bags with poisonous snakes.
    - (2) Christians would be bound on beaches at low tide and would slowly drown as the tide came in.
  - vi) Warren Weirby said, "You had better not try to get your theology from circumstances. If you do, you will come to the conclusion that God does not love you."
    - (1) John 11:5
      - (a) Jesus loves Martha, her sister and Lazarus.
    - (2) Lazarus gets sick and dies.
    - (3) John 11:14
      - (a) Jesus said He was glad that Lazarus had died.
        - (i) God had a greater plan for Lazarus.
  - vii) God has not promised that we will not know difficulty; He has promised that we will know ultimate victory.
  - viii) Romans 8:35-37
    - (1) God does not say that we will never have: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or the sword.
    - (2) These are not things that only happen to those who do not love the Lord.
      - (a) These are things that happen to the victorious.
    - (3) God has promised never to leave us, nor forsake us, but He has not promised that we will never have difficulty.
  - ix) John the Baptist
    - (1) Jesus said, "Not a greater born of woman."



- (a) Matthew 11:11
- (2) Yet, John the Baptist went through a time of doubt.
- (3) He was thrown in jail and would soon be killed.
- (4) John wonders, "If Jesus can heal the sick and raise the dead, why can't he get me out of prison?"
- (5) He sent messengers to Jesus to ask Him if He is truly the Christ.
- (a) Matthew 11:2-3
- (6) Never mistake the moment for the man.
- (7) Matthew 11:4-6
  - (a) Jesus tells the messengers to tell John, "I can open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, cleanse lepers and raise the dead. If I have not taken you out of prison, it is not because I cannot. Do not get offended at Me."
- x) If you have prayed and asked God to do a miracle and He has not done it, it is not because He cannot or does not love you.
  - (1) "Faith is not receiving from God so much what we want as it is accepting from God what He gives or what He allows."
- xi) You need to have an "if not" clause in your faith.
  - (1) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
    - (a) Daniel 3:16-18
      - (i) They said, "Our God is able, and we believe He will, but if He does not it is not because He is not able. We will not bow before your filthy idol."
      - (ii) They had a subtle faith; they didn't have to huddle about it because their minds were already made up.
      - (iii) They had a sure faith; they knew their God was able.
      - (iv) They had a steadfast faith; even if He does not, we will not bow to your pagan idol.
- xii) Are you ready to quit just because God does not do the thing that you ask Him to do?
  - (1) You need to have an "if not" clause in your faith.
  - (2) It does not mean that your faith is weak, it means that it is stronger than ever.
- xiii) James and Simon Peter
  - (1) King Herod put James in prison and then killed him.
  - (2) King Herod then put Simon Peter in prison and intended to kill him.
  - (3) But God miraculously delivered Simon Peter.
    - (a) The jail gates swung open and Peter walked out.
  - (4) Was James wrong and Peter right? No!
  - (5) Did God love Peter more than He loved James? No!
    - (a) God has sovereign purposes in life.
- c) Are you willing to let God be God?
- d) Are you willing to have an "if not" clause in your faith?
- e) Are you willing to dwell among the "and others?"
  - i) This does not diminish the supernatural power of God.
- f) We ask for faith to escape, but do we have the faith to endure?
- g) We ask for faith to be healed, but do we have faith not to be healed and still serve and praise God?
  - i) Job 13:15
  - ii) Habakkuk 3:17-18

#### 4) MATURE FAITH IS BASED ON THE SETTLED PROMISES OF GOD

- a) Ever promise of God is "Yea and Amen" in the Lord Jesus Christ.



- b) Hebrews 11:39-40
  - i) The “and others” had not yet received the promise.
  - ii) God has a wonderful plan and He is working on that plan.
  - iii) God’s plan includes the Old Testament saints, the early Christians and all of us.
- c) One day, God will bring it all together and will fulfill His promises to them and to us.
  - i) God cannot lie.
  - ii) God cannot fail.
- d) These early Christians had faith, and if they did not have the answer in their hand, they had it in their heart.
  - i) They based their faith on the steadfast promises of God.
  - ii) They had an eye to the future.
- e) Sometimes we expect too much of life and not enough of God.
  - i) We measure life by pleasure and money; but when something happens, we lose our faith.
  - ii) Even the good things of life are going to ultimately fail you.
    - (1) Life is fickle.
    - (2) We will not find everything we look for in this life.
    - (3) We need to rest on the great, eternal promises of God.
      - (a) If you lose all of your money and possessions, remember, that is not your greatest treasure.
      - (b) If you never become famous, it is what God thinks of you that matters.
      - (c) If you have a loved one who dies in Jesus, there is a homecoming in Heaven.
- f) God has not forgotten His promises.
  - i) God gave the land of Israel to Abraham and all his descendants.
    - (1) They don’t have it now, but they will.
  - ii) Matthew 5:5
  - iii) When we pray for our loves ones and they die, was that prayer lost; no, it was heard.
    - (1) Those in Heaven are whole, we are sick.
  - iv) In the average prayer meeting, we pray more for sick saints than we do for lost sinners.
  - v) We pray to keep saints out of Heaven more than the lost out of Hell.
  - vi) John 17:24
    - (1) We are the bride and Jesus is the Bridegroom; the Bridegroom wants the bride with Him.
- g) Philippians 1:21
- h) Matthew 16:18
- i) The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not dead and we are not presiding over the funeral of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## 5) CONCLUSION

- a) Why I follow Christ.
  - i) There is no statistical evidence that fewer Christians die of cancer or other disease than non-believers.
    - (1) Therefore, I will not follow Christ for promised healing.
    - (2) I will not deny or dispute evidence of restoration of health.
    - (3) I will rejoice in the recovery of those from certain death.
    - (4) I will continue to pray for the healing of others.
  - ii) There is no evidence that Christians escape disaster and accident more than non-believers.
    - (1) Christians are equally affected by natural disasters.
    - (2) A bullet does not detour around the body of a believer.



- (3) Therefore, I will not follow Christ for promised protection from disaster.
- (4) I will not scoff at amazing survivals.
- (5) I recognize that God's will has and continues to be at work.
- (6) I will pray for protection from wicked men and tragedy.
- iii) There is no evidence that Christians are especially favored with prosperity.
  - (1) The rich often oppress the poor.
  - (2) Justice in this world is rarely perfect.
  - (3) Psalm 37:25
  - (4) We all know people with integrity who have not prospered.
  - (5) Therefore, I will not follow Christ for promised freedom from physical want or hope of affluence.
- iv) There is no evidence that Christians have stronger personalities or fewer neurosis than non-believers.
  - (1) There is no bitterness like that of religious bitterness.
  - (2) Christians suffer under emotional and mental disabilities.
  - (3) There is no doubt that the Christians attitude and actions will be improved by his Christianity.
  - (4) But I will not follow Christ for any promise of personality enhancement or perfection.
- v) Why then follow Christ?
  - (1) In Jesus we behold the face of God.
    - (a) He is the everlasting truth; God in human flesh.
    - (b) In His life, death and resurrection I am reconciled to God.
    - (c) He has all power and goodness and we can trust Him in His promises.
    - (d) He is the one certain thing in an uncertain world.
    - (e) He is to be worshipped, not so that something will happen to me.
      - (i) Something already has: God, through Christ, has reconciled the world to Himself; He saves us.
      - (ii) He is our justification.
  - (2) We offer our lives to God, not to be healthy, wealthy and wise or to gain strength to do things for Him; but because He alone can claim us.
- vi) God is not a means to an end.
- b) When faith seems to fail, it may be that you are asking of your faith something that God never intended for your faith.
  - i) Real faith is to center your life on Almighty God.
  - ii) Mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God.
  - iii) Mature faith bows to the sovereign purposes of God.
  - iv) Mature faith is based on the steadfast promises of God.
    - (1) "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."
- c) Do you know Jesus personally? If not, you can pray to Him today by asking Him to come into your life.
- d) Call upon Jesus today. Repent (turn) from your sins, and turn to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
  - i) Romans 3:23
  - ii) Romans 10:9-10
  - iii) Romans 10:13
  - iv) Acts 16:31
  - v) John 3:16



# When Faith Seems to Fail

**SERMON REFERENCE:** Hebrews 11:32-39

**LWF SERMON NUMBER:** #2410

Take your Bibles, find Hebrews chapter 11, and look up here. We've been talking about faith. We're in a series of Bible sermons entitled, "Champions of Faith." You can't live the Christian life apart from faith, for the Bible says clearly, plainly that we live by faith. The just shall live by faith. Lord Jesus said in Matthew 9:29, "According to your faith be it unto you." The writer of Hebrews says in chapter 11 verse 6, "Apart from faith it is impossible to please God." So we need not only to possess faith; we need a faith that possesses us.

But what happens sometimes when faith seems to fail? Sometimes we pray, maybe we're going to have an outdoor event and we say, "Lord, give us beautiful weather," and the bottom falls out. Has that ever happened to you? I mean, it turns everything into a swamp, and you prayed and you asked God for it. Sometimes you pray and you say, "Lord, I want to marry that man. Give him to me as a husband," and he marries your best friend. You say, "Lord!"

On a more serious note, sometimes we have a loved one who is sick and we come to God and we say, "O God, heal my child." "Lord, heal my wife." "Heavenly Father, touch with Your healing hand," and they don't get better; they get worse, and it seems like some greedy malady is just eating away at those that we love the best, and we see them wind down to the grave. And we've tried to believe, we've tried to trust, and faith seems to fail. We're ready just to throw in the towel, and say, "What's the use? It's not working." Have you ever been there? Hold on, you may be. Time come sometimes where the answer doesn't come exactly as we think that it ought. Sometimes trials, temptations, tribulations, heartaches, tears, fears; they come and faith doesn't seem to remove them.

Now, actually, that's why this eleventh chapter of Hebrews is written because there were some who were ready to throw in the towel. There were some who were ready to hang it up. They had been serving the Lord and there was great persecution. Actually, to get a running start on Hebrews chapter 11 you need to go back to Hebrews chapter 10 verse 36, for the writer there says, "You have need of patience that, after ye have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." You need to learn to endure.

Let's look here in Hebrews chapter 11 and look here at some of the amazing victories of faith. Let's look in verse 32. Now, the writer of Hebrews chapter 11, who I personally think was Paul, but I wouldn't go to the mat with you about it. Look in Hebrews verse 32 through verse 39, "And what shall I more say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; and of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets," now listen to this, "who, through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again." Now if it just ended there, we'd say, "Sign me up! That's the kind of life I want."

But there is another two words here that some of us may not like. "And others," "And others," listen, "were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had a trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned,



they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and cave of the Earth.” Well, something must have been wrong with them; they must not have had faith. Oh, oh. Notice verse 39, “And all these, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.” God said, “What do they get on their report card? A+.” How did they do it? By faith. Did they escape? No, they did not escape; they endured. Some escaped by faith, some endured by faith. All had faith, but sometimes it seems like faith seems to fail.

Now I want to give you three propositions this morning so that you will have a mature faith. Many people have a superficial faith and a superstitious faith rather than a strong faith and a spiritual faith and a biblical faith. So if you’re about ready to throw in the towel, if you prayed for your child and your child didn’t get well and you’re ready to quit coming. And, by the way, we have people; I, always, as a pastor I see them. I see them in church. They’re doing fine until the crisis comes, till the bottom falls out, and they quit. They don’t endure. They don’t continue. They say, in effect, “It’s not working,” and so they quit. They have an immature faith, sometimes a superstitious faith.

All right, you ready for three principles? Number one: **mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God.** Now that means if God doesn’t do it, it is not because He cannot. Look again in Hebrews 11 verses 32 through 35, “And what shall I more say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; and of David also, and Samuel, and the prophets. Who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women receive their dead raised to life again, and others were.” Stop right there. Now all of these are supernatural, supernatural deliverance. And, friend, we all love those stories. We have learned them from childhood.

Daniel in the lions’ den. Don’t you love the story of old Daniel? They said, “Daniel, don’t pray. We’ll throw you in the lions’ den.” He prayed anyway. They threw him in the lions’ den and God gave the lions lockjaw. And old Daniel pulls up a fluffy lion and fluffs him up and uses him for pillow, gets his Old Testament out, and begins to read between the lions. We love those stories.

We love the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They said, “Bow down to the pagan idol or we’ll cast you in the fiery furnace.” They said, “We’re not going to worship your filthy idol.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace. They wouldn’t bow. They wouldn’t budge. But they wouldn’t burn. And the king looks in the fiery furnace. He said, “I thought we threw three guys in there. There are four in there, and the fourth is like the Son of God.” And Jesus walked through the fire with them and they came out, the Bible says in Daniel 3:27, “Without the smell of smoke in their clothes.” I can’t even go to the barber shop without the smell of smoke in my clothes. What a mighty God they served.

David and Goliath, and David slew Goliath. We’ve heard that story since we were children. Goliath over nine feet tall. Everybody else was afraid of Goliath. Not young David. David was just a kid, hadn’t even begun to shave yet, I don’t believe. The Bible said, “He was fair and of a ruddy countenance.” Everybody else thought that Goliath was too big to hit; David thought he was too big to miss. Everybody else was thinking, “Look how much bigger Goliath is than we are.” David was thinking, “Look how much smaller Goliath is than God is.” And God gave David the victory over this giant. We love those stories.



We love the story in the New Testament of Simon Peter. Been cast into prison by wicked Herod. An angel comes in and leads him out of prison, and the angel says, “Wake up, Simon, get dressed.” That is, “We’re not sneaking out; we’re going out in class.” The doors open and he walks out of that prison, great jail break. As a matter of fact, as you read the Bible, Simon Peter had more difficulty getting into a prayer meeting afterward than he had getting out of jail. We love those stories. I love those stories.

And I’m going to tell you something. If you have walked with Jesus for a long time, every one of you have a story like that where God miraculously, supernaturally, inexplicably worked in your heart and in your life and no way to explain apart from God, and you say, “Praise God.” The supernatural power of God. Now I’m telling you, mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God. And don’t ever say there’s something God cannot do. God can do anything, anything, anything but fail. God cannot fail. Now that’s a mature faith. So if you think I’m trying to explain away the miraculous in this message, you missed the whole thing. The writer of Hebrews gives all of these illustrations. Mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God. Got it? Okay.

Now, number two: **mature faith bows to the sovereign purposes of God.** Now there is God’s supernatural power, but there is also God’s sovereign purpose. Sometimes God’s ways are mysterious, but that doesn’t mean they’re weak. Notice Hebrews 11 again, beginning in verse 35 through verse 39, “Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had a trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the Earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.” Now we love the exciting victories, but sometimes they don’t seem to come. The Bible says, “And some were stoned.”

Zechariah the prophet was stoned to death. Stephen was stoned. Oh, you say, “He must not have been right with God.” No, he was filled with the Holy Ghost. Simon Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost. He got 3,000 souls. Stephen was filled with the Holy Ghost and got, perhaps, 3000 stones. Both of them filled with the Holy Ghost. Verse 37 says that some were sawn in two, “Sawn asunder.” Most likely that refers to Isaiah. Isaiah was put in a hollow tree, according to tradition, by the king. And King Manasseh had the prophet that he hated put in a hollow tree and the hollow tree was then sawn down. He thought that would be a way to mock God’s prophet. Can you imagine being cut in two with a crosscut saw? And another says, “They wandered about in skins,” and so forth. You see, the ancients used to make delight and fun out of torturing godly people.

The early Christians were sometimes dressed in animal skins and then turned loose in the woods so the dogs would bay after them in the hunt. Sometimes they were fed to the lions. Go to Rome sometimes and go to the Coliseum. Go to the Circus Maximus where bloodthirsty crowds would sit up there and say, “Bring on the Christians! Bring on the Christians!” And they would seal their faith with their lives.

I’ve read the Book of Martyrs. I’ve read where Christians would be sewn up in bags with poisonous serpents. They would be tied to the beaches at low tide so when the tide would come in they would drown slowly. Warren Weirsby said, “You’d better not try to get your theology from circumstances. If you



do, you'll come to the conclusion that God doesn't love you." "If you get your theology", listen, "If you get your theology from circumstances, you will come to the conclusion that God doesn't love you."

Let me give you an example of that. In John chapter 11 and verse 5, the Bible says clearly and plainly that, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." No ifs, ands, and buts about it. Jesus loved them. Now Lazarus gets sick and then he dies. In John chapter 11 and verse 14, listen to this now, "And Jesus said unto them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and I'm glad.'" Did I hear right? In verse 5 He loved Martha, and her sister and Lazarus. Verse 14, "Lazarus is dead, and I'm glad." Now, friend, if you tried to reconcile those without knowing the whole story, you'd say, "Hey, there's something very confusing here." You see, God has not promised. God had, well, let me just back up and say God had a greater plan for Lazarus, didn't He?

You see, God has not promised that we would not know difficulty. As a matter of fact, what He has promised is we will know ultimate victory. That's the reason that one of my favorite books in the Bible, if not my favorite, is Romans, and one of my favorite chapters in Romans is chapter 8, and some of my favorite verses in Romans 8 are verses 35 through 37 that ask a question, "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're 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." He doesn't say you're not going to have these things. Don't get the idea that somehow these things happen to those who don't love the Lord. No, these are things that happen to the victorious. You see, friend, He has promised never to leave us, never to forsake us, but He has not promised that we will never have difficulty.

Now if difficulty comes, you may be ready to quit. That happened to John the Baptist. You know, John the Baptist was a great man. I suppose the greatest compliment ever paid to a human being was paid by the Lord Jesus of John the Baptist. You know what Jesus said of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11? "Not a greater born of woman." Pretty good compliment, right? "Not a greater born of woman." Yet John the Baptist had a spell of doubt. John the Baptist was perhaps ready to hang it up, ready to throw in the towel, ready to quit. Why is this?

Well, John the Baptist had been out there by the River Jordan preaching. He had a rock for a pulpit, a babbling brook for a choir, and as Dr. Lee used to say, "He ate honey, but he didn't preach it." He preached repent. Called some of them a bunch of rattlesnakes. Said, "Come to God." And he's pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ. He's an outdoorsman. He was a rugged prophet, a man of God. But then he's taken and put in prison. Can you imagine John the Baptist now in prison, some dungeon, some damp, smelly dungeon? Soon he's going to have his head taken off.

Now he's a man of God. He had been preaching a victorious Christ, a Christ whose winnowing fan was in his hand blowing away the chaff and burning it, baptizing with the Holy Ghost and with fire, a Messiah, and now he's in prison. And he's wondering; "If He can heal the sick and raise the dead, and I've been true to Him, why can't He get me out of prison?" And he sent some people; you can hardly believe this is John the Baptist. He sent some messengers to Jesus and said, "Would you go ask Him if He's really the Messiah?" O John! "Would you go ask Him if He's really the Messiah, or should we look for somebody else?" Matthew 11 verses 2 and 3. Now remember, this is not an ordinary man. This is not a six or a seven, friend; this is a 10. This is the one that Jesus said, "Not a greater among men than John the Baptist."



Let me tell you something right now. Never mistake the moment for the man, okay. This wasn't the whole John the Baptist. But he had a sinking spell. He had a doubt. Now, I want you to listen to what Jesus says to him. Matthew 11 verses 4 through 6, "Jesus answered and said unto them," these people who came with John's question, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them," and now look, notice this, "And blessed is he, who-soever shall not be offended in Me." "Now, John, let Me tell you something, son. I can open blind eyes. I can unstop deaf ears. I can cleanse lepers. I can raise the dead. And, John, if I have not taken you out of prison, it's not because I can't. Now, John, don't get offended at Me."

And, friend, I want to tell you something. If you prayed and asked God to do a miracle for you and He's not done it, it's not because He can't, Amen? It's not because He can't. It's not because He's unlimited. And it's not because He does not love. And don't you pout at God. Don't get offended. A wise man once said, "Faith is not receiving from God so much what we want as it is accepting from God what He gives or what He allows." That is faith. Therefore, you need to have an "if not" clause in your faith.

We mentioned a while back Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And the king says, "Look, if you don't bow down to this image, you're going to be cast into the fiery furnace. Now give me your answer." Here's the answer, Daniel chapter 3, beginning in verse 16 and going through verse 18, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.'" That is, "We don't have to study about it." "If be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." But now notice this, verse 18, "But if not," now if those words are not underscored in your Bible, they really ought to be. "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Now they said, "Our God is able, and we believe He will. But if He doesn't, it's not because He's not able, and we're not going to bow before your filthy image." Notice they had a settled faith. They didn't say, "Well, let's huddle about it." Their mind was already made up. They had a sure faith: "Our God is able." But they also had a steadfast faith that, "Even if He doesn't, even if we're turned to bacon in that furnace, we're not going to worship your idol. Our God is able, but we know that if He doesn't, we're still not going to worship your idol."

Are you ready to quit just because God doesn't do the thing that you ask Him to do? You'd better have an "if not" clause in your faith. It doesn't mean that your faith is weak; it means that it is stronger than ever. "God, I know You're able. But if You don't do it, Lord, I'm going to serve You anyway. I'm not going to make bargains with You." Sometimes we don't understand why God does things. What I'm talking about is a mature faith bows to the sovereign purposes of God.

Let me give you another example. Wicked King Herod took James, put him in prison, and killed him. Everybody thought, "Boy, that was a good thing to do." So he took the big guy, Simon Peter, put him in prison. "Well, he's going to kill Simon Peter also." And God miraculously delivered Simon Peter. I already told you the story, how he walked out of there and the jail gates just swung open, and all of that. Question: Herod takes James and puts him to death. Herod takes Peter and he's delivered from prison. You explain it. Was James wrong and Peter right? Did God love Peter more than He loved James? No. God has some sovereign purposes in life.



Are you willing to let God be God? Are you? Are you willing to have an “if not” clause in your faith? Are you willing to dwell among the “and others” if necessary? That’s not to diminish the supernatural power of God. You say, “Well, I want faith to escape.” I hope you have it, but if you don’t, do you have faith to endure? I want you to have faith to be healed, but if you don’t, do you have faith not to be healed and still serve God and praise God, and say with old Job in Job 13:15, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” I will serve You, no matter what. Habakkuk 3 verses 17 and 18, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

Now here’s the third and final thing I want to say to you this morning. Listen, mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God. We never diminish the supernatural power of God. Number two: mature faith bows to the sovereign purposes of God. It lets God be God. Number three: **mature faith is based on the settled promises of God.** Every promise of God is, “Yea” and “Amen” in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now notice Hebrews 11 verses 39 through 40, “And these all,” those who escaped and those who endured, “these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promises,” that is, they haven’t received it as yet, “God having provided something better for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” Now what does that mean in plain English? God has such a wonderful plan, and God is working on that plan. And it includes not only these Old Testament saints and these early Christians, but it includes all of us. One of these days God’s going to bring it all together and God is going to fulfill His promises to them and to us. God will keep His promise. God cannot lie. God cannot fail. And these people had faith, and if they did not have the answer in their hand, they had it in their heart, and they’re basing their faith on the steadfast promises of God. That is, they had an eye to the future.

Sometimes we expect too much of life and not enough of God. We measure life by eat, drink, and be merry and then the Stock Market caves in and craters and some people jump off buildings, and so forth, because that’s where their faith was. Friend, even the good things of this life are going to ultimately fail you, I don’t care who they are. You fall in love and get married. Sooner or later you may sit in an empty family room looking at pictures on the wall. Life is fickle. If you’re looking for everything in this life, you’re not going to find it. You need to rest on the great eternal promises of God. And if things go upside down on you and all of your money is lost, remember that’s not your greatest treasure anyway. If you never, ever become known and famous, it’s what God thinks about you that really counts. If you have a loved one in Jesus who dies, there’s a homecoming in Heaven.

God has not forgotten His promises. God gave the land of Israel to Abraham and every grain of sand belongs, there in the Holy Land, to Abraham and his descendants. They don’t have it now, but they will. Jesus said in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth.” Be meek today and see how much of it you get. I’m not saying don’t be meek, but it’s yet to come. We pray for our loved ones to be healed and they die. Was that prayer lost? No, it was heard. Those in Heaven are whole; we are sick. They’re made like the Lord Jesus Christ.

You get in the average prayer meeting. What are we praying for? We’re praying for the sick more than we’re praying for lost, more interested in keeping the saints out of Heaven than the lost out of Hell. In John 17 verse 24, Jesus is praying, “Father, I pray for those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may



be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." We're the bride; He's the bridegroom. Don't you think the bridegroom wants the bride with Him?

So Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "For me to die is gain." We get things upside down sometimes. Sometimes people look around and they say, "Well, the church is failing. There's scandal and there's this and there's that." Friend, listen to me. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 16 verse 18, "I will build My church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not dead, and we're not presiding over the funeral of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The promises of God are, "Yea and Amen."

I'm going to close this message this morning talking about the supernatural power of God, the sovereign purposes of God, and the steadfast promises of God by reading to you something that was sent to me in the mail. One of our listeners sent this. One of the most poignant things I've ever read. I want you to listen to it. Now I want you to excuse me for reading something a little long. Here's what this man says:

"Why I Follow Christ." Are you listening? "I've not seen clearer statistical evidence that fewer Christians die of cancer than non-believers, or that they are immune in greater degree from the diseases that afflict the human race. Some of the kindest, most selfless persons I have known have had more than their share of bad health. The fact that they belong to Christ did not insulate them from disease. Therefore, I will not follow Christ for promised healing. I will not deny or dispute evidence of restoration of health. I will rejoice at every recovery from what seems to be hopeless, threatened death. I will not hesitate to pray for recovered health for my loved ones and acquaintances. I will set no limits on what God may do, but I will not follow Christ for promised healing.

I see no sign that Christians escape disaster and accident more often than others. I've helped dear friends empty muddy water out of dresser drawers and new appliances after a disastrous flood. I remember as a child taking clothes to a widow with five children whose house had burned to the ground. A bullet makes no detour around the body of a believer. Therefore, I will not follow Christ for any promised protection from disaster. I will not scoff at amazing survivals nor deny that providence has and continues to work for the good of God's own. I will continue to pray for protection from wicked men and tragedy, but I will not follow Christ for promised protection from accident or catastrophe.

I do not observe that Christians are especially favored with prosperity like James. We've all seen the rich oppressing the poor and justice is rarely perfect in this world. The psalmist has said in Psalm 37 verse 25 that he, "Had not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread," and in the deepest needs of this life that is certainly true. But all of us have known people of integrity who have not prospered. Therefore, I will not follow Christ for promised freedom from physical want or hope of affluence.

I'm not sure the Christians have stronger personalities or fewer neurosis than non-believers. I do know that there is no bitterness like religious bitterness and no arrogance more insufferable. I have watched Christians suffer emotional and mental disabilities. And though it may seem heretical, I am not sure that I would really enjoy living in the same house with either the apostle Peter or Paul." I like that. "God wills that the mind of Christ be formed in us, and there is no doubt in my mind that the Christian's attitudes and actions will be improved by his Christianity, but I will not follow Christ for any promise of personality enhancement or perfection.



Why then follow Christ? Why become a disciple of Jesus when life may become more complicated as He so often warned? For one reason alone, "in Jesus we behold the face of God. He is the truth, the everlasting truth, God in the flesh. I know that in His life, death, and resurrection I am reconciled to God, the giver of life. I believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God. He has all power and goodness and I trust Him and His promises. To Him I offer my life, damaged or whole, brief or full of years, it matters not. He is the one certain thing in an uncertain world. He is to be worshipped not so something will happen to me or to the world; something already has happened to me and the world; but because He is God who, through Christ, has reconciled the world to Himself. He saves me. He is my justification. He is the center that holds. To worship the God of our salvation, to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, that alone is our vocation. We offer our lives to God, not so as to be healthy, wealthy, or wise; not even so to gain the strength to do great things for Him. We offer our lives to Him because He alone has claim upon us. God is not a means to an end." That was written by John C. Hutchinson, Jr., in 1981. And that was passed to me.

Now, friend, that's one of the greatest things that I've ever read. When faith seems to fail; it may be that you're asking of your faith something that God never really intended for your faith. Real faith, listen to me, real faith is to center your life on Almighty God. Mature faith believes in the supernatural power of God. Mature faith bows to the sovereign purposes of God. Mature faith is based on the steadfast promises of God. And one of the greatest is this: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. Simple and sweet, a wonderful promise.

Bow your heads in prayer. If you're not certain that you're saved, this is the time. Would you pray a prayer like this, "Oh God, help me today not to be ashamed of You. Help me today, Lord, to take that step of faith, to openly and publicly acknowledge Jesus as my Lord and Savior." The Bible says, "Whosoever will may come." And I want you to say, "Now, Lord Jesus, help me not to be ashamed of You, but to openly and publicly trust You today. Dear God, I know that You love me. Thank You for loving me. And I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me and You promised to save me if I would trust You. Jesus, I do trust You. I believe You're the Son of God. I believe you paid for my sin with Your blood on the cross. I believe that God raised You from the dead. And now I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Come into my life. Take control of my life and begin today to make me the person You want me to be. And Jesus, give me the courage to make it public. Help me never to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray, Amen."



PO Box 38300 | Memphis TN 38183-0300 | (901)382-7900