

Faith in Everyday Heroes

Hebrews 11:32-37

Most of you would have met my 9-year-old son. He is obsessed with superheroes. He has got so many costumes, masks, toys, comic books and anything you can get about them. It doesn't matter who it is. It can be from DC or Marvel, he loves them all. I think all of us have had some kind of attachment towards superheroes sometime in our lives. I think there is something about superheroes that makes us want to have those special abilities. It is also the fact that these people are ordinary people in the world just like us.

I am not the biggest superhero fan in the world, but I do find it fascinating that all these people aren't perfect. Even though they excel in something, they have weaknesses as well. The creators have gone out of their way to make sure that most of them have some sort of weakness or fault, like Superman and Kryptonite, Thor without his hammer, Aquaman out of Water. Superheroes are not perfect.

Another thing that fascinates me about superheroes, is that most of them are portrayed as ordinary people beforehand or at the same time as their role as a superhero. Look at the two earliest superheros. Zorro in 1916 and then Superman a few years later. The creators of Zorro, the first recognised superhero, wanted him to fit into everyday life. They made his character an ordinary person, not someone important in society before finding his inner skills, donning a mask and then protecting the people with his sword. Then we all know Superman's story, Clarke Kent was the reporter for the daily planet. These creators have gone out of their way to make superheroes everyday members of society.

Have a think about the heroes in your own life, they are ordinary people who have done extraordinary things. It is the same with the people who are talked about in Hebrews 11, it describes the way

that God has used ordinary flawed individuals to do some amazing things.

I love the Old Testament. I love it because it tells real stories of everyday people and our miraculous God working through them. The list of characters in the Hebrews passage are all powerful people of God. Some you might know some you might not know, but they all made mistakes and they were all faithful at one stage of their lives which enabled them to achieve great things. The biblical writers did not edit out the flaws of its heroes. they left them in there to provide an example for us. The men and women of the Old Testament could be gentle, holy, defenders of the faith one minute, and then they could be insecure, unstable, unbelieving, shrewd, lying individuals the next.

Sounds familiar?

They were ordinary people who were used by God. Everyone here can be a hero, one of God's heroes. You see, a Christian hero is not some superman, endowed with a myriad of abilities and talents. It is an individual who is willing to believe God's Word, commit himself to God's Will, and devote himself to God's Work.

Let's have a look at some of these people a little deeper.

First up Rahab, the writer of Hebrews has no issues with using a woman and one who is a Prostitute as an example of great faith. Joshua sent two spies out to scope the land of Jericho. They came across Rahab's house. The military in Jericho went to Rahab's house to arrest the Israelites, but Rahab protects them. In Joshua 2:11 Rahab says, 'When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.' She has great fear and respect for God. She puts her faith in God and the Israelites to protect her.

Then there was Gideon, the story of Gideon can be found in the book of Judges. Initially Gideon doubts God and seeks to test him. The famous story of Gideon is found in Judges 6:36-40

36 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— 37 look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." 38 And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." 40 That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

After God proved himself once, Gideon still needed extra assurance that God would be with him and on his side. Once he realised this then he was able to do amazing things. In the next chapter we hear how strong the Midianite army was. Gideon originally assembles all his men over 30000, but God says it's too much so after a few other requests it is dwindled down to just 300. On the surface there is no way only 300 can defeat a whole army. But with faith in God Gideon defeats the enemy.

Next, we have Barak. Barak was a military leader along with a prophet named Deborah they were able to defeat the Canaanites who had oppressed them for 20 years, this is found in Judges 4 and 5. The problem with Barak was that he didn't have faith in God initially. When Deborah got a message from God saying that Barak was going to deliver the Israelites from the Canaanites he said he wouldn't do. Then he said he would only do it if Deborah came too. Initially he didn't have the faith to do it.

Then there is Samson, the one thing people remember about Samson is his hair, but probably not too much more. Samson was a great man of God and was able to achieve so much for God. But on one occasion Samson was overcome with lust and laid with a prostitute named Delilah, he was also very selfish and looked after his own needs before God and anyone else. In the end he turned to God to help him, and God gave him the strength to kill a lot of the Philistines. Giving up his own life to kill and save others.

Finally, there is David and Samuel. Samuel was the first Judge in Israel and he loved God and obeyed God. There were times when Samuel had to make the tough decisions that put him in danger but his faith in God was great. It was Samuel that first called David to be king of Israel. Saul was king at the time, but Samuel obeyed God's leading and anointed David even though Saul was still king.

Then there is David. He is probably one of my favourite characters in the bible, because he is such a great man of God but like all of us he stumbles a lot. We all know of his faith in God when he slayed Goliath and defeated other kings but there were also times when there was great sin in his life. David committed adultery with Bathsheba. He then tried to cover up her pregnancy, and when he failed with that, he had her husband Uriah the Hittite killed. He took a census of the people, wilfully violating God's command not to do that.

All these heroes were flawed individuals, yet they all had faith in God and they went on to achieve great things, among them were women, and men, Israelites and non-Israelites.

I want to touch on the second half of the passage, from the second half of verse 35

'There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by

the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.'

It seems a little strange to put all these other examples of heroes of faith in this reading. Why is it there? I think there are two reasons. Firstly, I think it shows us just what some of these people went through for God. It shows the lengths they suffered because of their faith. They had immeasurable faith in God that they could withstand anything the enemy threw at them. What an inspiration!

The other point is that it shows us that Christianity is hard, a life following Jesus is hard. There is a misconception that some people think that when they become a Christian their life becomes easy. It doesn't. Life is just as hard if you follow Christ or if you don't. We are still going to hit difficult times, we are still going to hit grief, pain and loss. The difference is that we have someone with us no matter what. Jesus died on the cross for us, so he knows all about suffering, he is wanting us to have a relationship with him so we can get through these things together. We are not alone, Jesus walks with us.

We will still have difficult times, and this is where I want to introduce the Luke 12 passage. This is a passage that doesn't get talked about that often because it may appear that Jesus is being a bit harsh, but that is the reality of the gospel. Think about what Jesus was doing during his time on earth, he was leading a rebellion, he was standing up against a corrupt government. He was standing up against a time that disregarded women, the disabled and the poor. He was saying that sometimes people won't see things the same way you do, and you might even have arguments with your own family.

We have seen this happen for Christians in recent times. Some issues have split families, issues such as sexuality, abortion, racism just to

name a few. Christianity is not easy. Jesus ruffled some feathers and if we are true to our calling to be Christ in the world then we are going to ruffle some feathers, too just like the way in the second half of the Hebrews reading where some people got tortured, and flogged.

Christianity doesn't make life any easier, a faithful life might upset people but a relationship with God helps us get through the hard times. We have many examples of faithful servants of Christ who suffered through difficult circumstances which show us that that God can work miracles through ordinary people

So, wrapping all this up, let these stories be an inspiration to you. All the people here were ordinary people like you and I. They were all flawed individuals like you and I, however these people are Heroes of the Faith. These people worked through their flaws and became people who had awesome faith in God and did some immeasurable things for God. These people had some tough decisions to make, they ruffled feathers, they went through tough times, but God performed miracles through them.

This passage shows me what can be achieved by ordinary people. Jesus came to die for our sins, so we didn't have worry about them. We have a clean slate because of his sacrifice. God used prostitutes, adulterers and other ordinary people to amazing things. I have no doubt that there will be stories of us in Heaven, God will be talking about us in the same way as he did about David and Samson and the others.

As I have said earlier God doesn't require perfect people, he wants faithful people. So let this passage inspire you about the things that God can do through ordinary individuals and think about what God can do in you with just a little bit more faith.