



Hebrews 11:32 – 12:3

HEROES

WAR MEMORIAL

It's Remembrance Sunday; when we remember those who served and died for their country in two world wars and in other conflicts.

WOOTON BASSETT

And of course we still mourn the loss of those still killed in the conflict in Afghanistan.

We often hear the word "hero" attached to our armed services in such conflicts. Some are celebrated for their heroic Acts LANCE CORPORAL BUHARRI . Our soldiers, whether fallen, SOLDIERS veterans or serving are referred to as heroes, aren't they?

For those still serving are usually modest; most of them don't see themselves as heroes: just professional soldiers, airmen or sailors doing their job – albeit a very dangerous one. We also attach the words heroes to those who served and died in the two great world conflicts. As we look at their names on the war memorial plaques we see that those who died were just ordinary people from our church community who signed up to serve their country. They were survived by many others who returned from various conflicts. They were and are called heroes too.

RETURNING HOME

And of course as we see pictures of service people returning home and we realise that they are ordinary people with children and homes. Today, military personnel in this country are all professional but of course during the war, ordinary people volunteered or were conscripted from all walks of life to serve as soldiers, sailors and airmen. Ordinary people, who went through the horror of conflict and returned to ordinary life. I know of many older people who still speak very little of the war, or if they do they remember the good times rather than horrors that they saw.

I have been here 5 years now and when I came you were finishing up a series on Hebrews 11. In this chapter we are encouraged by the great people of faith in the Bible – BIBLE HEROES – who did great things for God. I can remember doing Barak when I came to speak with a squint. In the chapter there aren't just these, but others like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Rahab. People of God who by faith and by the power of God did extraordinary things.

Lets' recall them: *And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised;*

who shut the mouths of lions, 34 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. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again.

Amazing feats that we all find in the OT to remind us of great things that happens when we place our faith and trust in a great God. If you've been a Christian for a long time you will know these stories.

We know of contemporary stories and testimonies of people doing great things for God. We hear of people coming to Christ in large numbers, people being healed of diseases miraculously even though they are thought incurable. We hear stories of the dead raised. And we look at our situation and say – these are the stories of men and women of faith – but none of that seems to happen to me, or none of that seems to happen here. And it makes us feel inadequate.

But there's more to heroes than these great men. **AND THEN THERE WERE THE REST** Let's read on in the chapter: *Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated.*

We don't know their names, but what we have is a list of a people who kept their faith through suffering or whatever. The writer refers to people found in the OT and you'll find examples there. The sawn in half bit was a Jewish tradition of that time that said Isaiah died by being sawn apart.

And that sort of situation was what many of the Hebrew Christians being addressed in this were suffering already. They were facing opposition, discouragement. They felt like giving up.

They didn't think themselves heroes. But this passage makes it clear that the "others" were just as great heroes as the Biblical greats like Gideon, Barak and Jephthah. You can see the parallel with our war heroes. Not all of them had the VC or other decoration for valour, but all went through the conflict, suffered the hardships, suffered the horrors, were part of the war campaign – and they all ended up with their campaign medals and on this day each year, these men and women are valued exactly the same, whatever rank they were or whatever medals they won. And on the war memorial, the Private Soldiers are listed next to the Officers.

So it is in the Lord's army. We are all part of it. Some of us are called to do huge things, others of us seem to just always suffer – family problems, health problems, people dismissing our faith, the pressures of life, disappointment. We don't feel we're doing victorious things, but just hanging on to our faith when we seem to be attacked from all sides.

We're trying to be faithful but everything seems against us. We are called to be faithful like the Biblical heroes, but even though we are faithful and persevere,

things are not happening for us in the same way as it did for them. It is for us as it was for the Hebrew Christians – and the answer is the same too. As we look at this passage we find that the heroes are both the greats and the people that aren't named who persevered through all odds.

Think about it. If God calls us to do great acts of faith, it's by the power of the Spirit we do them, not ours. If God calls us to persevere in difficult situations, then we persevere to the end through the strength of the Holy Spirit, not ours. It's the Spirit who makes us heroes in God's army.

And to those who persevered; here's how Hebrews describes them.

VERSE The world was not worthy of them.

Particularly when we feel that people are against our faith and who don't respect us then the word of the writer to the Hebrews about those who opposed God's people, sometimes violently was that the world was not worthy of them. Think about it. What the world likes least are people who reflect goodness. They always try to do them down. If you want to live as God's man or woman, expect opposition because the world is not worthy of you. And that's not my sweeping judgement on society; it's the word of God.

I believe we should be encouraged by this. God honours those who remain faithful to Him through the struggles of life, just as He honours the Gideons, Baraks and Jephthah's. The writer to the Hebrews sums up both kinds of heroes in this way:

THESE WERE ALL COMMENDED for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

We are called to be a faithful people in God's army, in His church. We may never see the end or the result in this life. God measures greatness by faithfulness to Him. It's what spiritual heroism is all about – remaining faithful whatever.

OLYMPICS

This summer we hailed another kind of hero. These are quite unlike military heroes – they were the Olympic heroes.

BEING God's heroes

We are God's people – called to be heroes, called to persevere, called to win the prize and get the winner's medal. I remember doing a talk for the Awayday in the Summer and we thought about running the race to win the prize. Unlike an Olympic race, winning the prize doesn't involve beating others, it just involves finishing the race. God wants us to be spiritual heroes and all we have to do to win is just finish. There are plenty of motivations to reach the end of the race.

ENCOURAGED BY THE SPECTATORS

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

We aren't given this list of spiritual greats to make us feel small, but they stand as a cloud of witnesses to the fact that God can take ordinary people and make them extraordinary people by the power of His Spirit – that leads to extraordinary feats but also extraordinary perseverance in everything life and the enemy may throw at us. So the encouragement if we are feeling weak and a failure is to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and hang on in there by the power of the Spirit – and we know it works because a massive number of God's people have followed that path already.

MOTIVATED BY THE PRIZE

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

It isn't just what has happened in the past that should encourage us but we have an end to the race. Jesus is there urging us on to the finish. He's already been there and won our salvation for us. We follow Him and serve Him. Remember afresh what he has done for us and how that He had victory over the enemy, over sin and over death. And His victory is our victory. Take heart and find strength afresh this morning.

TITLE **Prayer**

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 11/11/2012
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