



The Burning Bush—Online article archive



Destruction of Sennacherib's host

Has the Free Presbyterian Church lost its stomach for the fight against idolatry and falsehood?

[A article based upon the message preached on Lord's Day evening, November 25th, 2007, by Rev Ivan Foster.](#)

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of 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," Hebrews 11:32-34.

The majority of men consider faith to be a mere delusion which tends to discourage human effort. But the account of faith at work that is given us in this chapter discounts that view entirely.

Telling the story of the exploits of the people of God in former times is a chief means of setting forth God's truth and mercy and of encouraging the saints of God today.

The word "tell" is the same word that is used by the Saviour when He directed the man delivered from many devils to "shew" his family what God had done, Luke 8:39.

There are so many instances of the great things that God did for and through men and women recorded in the Old Testament that a life time is too short to tell it all!

It is stated in John's gospel, 21:25, that ". . . there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

It might be said that if all the things which Jesus did through His believing people were recorded, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written!

Paul here seems to be at a loss to write appropriately on the matter of the exploits of the men and women of faith.

I wish this evening to consider just what made these victories referred to in the verses before us so great.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED

Consideration of the character of those mentioned here will help us to see just why the victories they enjoyed were so glorious.

1. They were lowly, not princely. They came from humble backgrounds. There are very few of God's great ones who have come from the nobility. Daniel was one exception. But



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

then it is not said that no prince or king will be saved. But rather: “not many mighty, not many noble, are called,” 1 Corinthians 1:26.

The preponderance of God’s people and God’s servants have been lowly people. “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them,” Matthew 11:5. “And the common people heard him gladly,” Mark 12:37. “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” James 2:5.

2. Each of those referred to in our text suffered from many weaknesses. Victorious faith in God did not come naturally. Faith, large or small, is not natural to man. It is a gift given of God. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God,” Ephesians 2:8.

It had to be imparted, nourished and sustained by God. Gideon is a clear example of this. The story of his fleece is well known. (Judges 6:36-40.) Please note that he knew he was manifesting unbelief in requesting a second sign. This is seen in his plea: “And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.” But the Lord gave him the second sign and ministered to his weakness. Indeed, He went further and provided Gideon another assurance just before he went forth against the Midianites. “And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that *were* in the host. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, *there was* a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This *is* nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: *for* into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. And it was *so*, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian,” Judges 7:9-15.

God coaxed Gideon along. A spirit of courage was granted for, by nature, when it comes to the battles of the Lord, we are cowards. “And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man (Goliath), fled from him, and were sore afraid,” 1 Samuel 17:24.

Peter and the other apostles all showed this cowardice. “And they all forsook him, and fled,” Mark 14:50. But what courage was granted to them when they were endued with the power of the Holy Ghost. “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the peo-



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

ple: for all *men* glorified God for that which was done," Acts 4:19-21. The source of that courage and boldness is made clear in this chapter. "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness," Acts 4:29-31.

All of us in the Free Presbyterian Church need such a spirit today!

I can humbly say that I can recall when such a spirit rested upon our church. It was not cowed by threats from government agencies, local authorities, from the police or from terrorist murderers. Sadly, today it is shamefully silent when it should be speaking out against sin in our midst.

3. God's victors were despised by many in their day. "And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all *thy* children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither," 1 Samuel 16:11. So little was thought of David that he had not even been called to the meeting with Samuel. Even after he was anointed before his family, he was still despised by his brethren. "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle. And David said, What have I now done? *Is there* not a cause?" 1 Samuel 17:28-29.

It must be said that when the despisings cease something has happened that should alarm the child of God.

II. THE DECLENSION OF THE DAYS IN WHICH THEY LIVED

God raised up these heroes of faith up in a time when His cause had greatly declined.

1. Sin was in power. The land was flooded by sin and iniquity in the days when these wonderful acts of faith took place. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years," Judges 6:1. This was true of all the incidents referred to in our text.

Medals for valour are won in a time of battle. They are not awards for parade-ground displays of precision!

Sinful backsliding had reduced them to great spiritual weakness. In such a time was Israel's deliverance wrought through faith.

2. The enemy was in power. Sin always puts the enemy into power! The sin amongst Ulster's leaders has placed Sinn Fein murderers in power in this land. The men in our text all lived in days when the enemies of God had come into a place of dominance. The spirit of the men of Judah in the day of Samson is illustrative of the spirit



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

that is abroad in Ulster today. "Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, **Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us?** what is this that thou hast done unto us?" Judges 15:11. The word "rulers" speaks of complete control. Note that this rule is accepted by the men and Samson's resistance is deemed unhelpful and foolish and contrary to their well-being! Do we not hear echoes of what is being said in Ulster today? There are Christians who say that placing murderers in government is what must be done for there is no alternative. That is the spirit of cowardice.

3. God's people were in disarray. The people of God were in a sadly contrasting state. Gideon threshing in a wine press epitomises the state of disarray Israelites were subjected to, Judges 6:11. The land was over-run and spoiled by the enemy.

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: *and* because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which *are* in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And *so* it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and **destroyed the increase of the earth**, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; *for* both they and their camels were without number: and **they entered into the land to destroy it**. And **Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites**; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD," Judges 6:1-6.

The word "Impoverished" = "brought very low". "Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I," Psalm 142:6.

III. THE ACHIEVEMENTS ACCOMPLISHED

"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," Hebrews 11:33-34.

There are nine accomplishments listed. When Paul listed the fruits of the Holy Spirit he listed nine, Gal 5:22-23. The nine victories were the fruit of the workings of God amongst His people.

The fulness of God's blessing upon His people can only be obtained through faith.

1. The victories were displays of God's power. It was through faith that God's power was harnessed and channelled into the affairs of the nation. Many will believe in the power of faith in healing of the body but reject the idea of its role on the battlefield. That is unbelief. Think upon Hezekiah and his praying against his enemies. "Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria," Isaiah 37:21. "And it came to pass that



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they *were* all dead corpses," 2 Kings 19: 35. "So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead," Isaiah 37: 38.

Such praying is not confined to the Old Testament. "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him," Acts 12: 1-5. We are familiar with the deliverance of Peter by God out of prison. But many have missed the rest of the answer to the prayer of the church. "And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's *country*. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, *saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied,*" Acts 12:20-24. That was a mighty answer to prayer. Please remember what Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:1-2. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

Such deliverances and mighty throne-toppling answers to prayer are not limited to the times of the Old Testament theocracy. They may be and should be sought today.

2. The victories were displays of God's purpose. He would have His people free and unencumbered by the rule of evil men. That is what 1 Timothy 2:1-2 teaches us.

Yes, there are times when faith does not deliver us from trouble but preserves us through it, Heb 11:35-38. We note what is said in these verses but, as a general rule, it may be said that deliverance from evil men is God's will for us.

3. The victories displayed the diversity of faith's accomplishments. There is not a blessing of the body or the soul which faith may not obtain. "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, *all things are possible* to him that believeth," Mark 9:23. There is no situation that is beyond being changed by faith. There is no threat facing us tonight in Northern Ireland that we may not bring before God for His intervention and delivering power.

Above all it is by faith that the sinner escapes hell's damnation. Gospel mercies are obtained and possessed through faith.



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God," Ephesians 2:8.

"And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Luke 7:50.

"Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses," Acts 13:38-39.

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees

And looks to God alone.

Laughs at impossibilities

And cries 'it shall be done'!

May that be the spirit manifested amongst us again.

A recording of the sermon may be obtained via Sermonaudio. Look for the link on the sermon page of this site.