

* **Watching for Christ's Return**
Matthew 25:1-13

* **Faith: Strength to Endure (1)**
Hebrews 11:33-39

* **Faith: Strength to Endure (2)**
Hebrews 11:33-39

* **Patiently Run the Race**
Hebrews 12:1

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January 4, 2015 — No. 3757

January 25, 2015 — No. 3760

are told in our text that Christ did that. He endured the cross. He suffered through the most excruciating pain of body and soul. He suffered under the heavy and painful wrath of God in order to accomplish our salvation. He did this as the author and finisher of our faith—the one who by means of the cross accomplished for us all the work of salvation. But what we must realize is that to do this Christ had to endure much shame. He was ridiculed by men, mocked, spit upon, and rejected of them. Christ was forsaken by God and alone in His death. But Christ despised that shame, i.e., He willingly suffered it. He stood in the face of that shame and scorned it.

Why? Because Christ had His eye on the prize! What was that? The power that would be given Him at the right hand of God's throne. Christ now rules at God's right hand. He has through His humiliation been exalted to highest glory and power. Christ in His power executes the decrees of God. And that is the greatest of all joys! Christ had His eye on the joy that He would be given to rule over all, and Christ endured. He persevered! As a result, He gained the prize! And it is through His power as the winner of the race that Christ gives you and me the strength to run!

III. The Eternal Prize

Yet always, at all times, we must keep our eye on Christ—the author and finisher of our faith. And in that connection we must always remained focused on the goal, the prize that will be ours when we cross the finish line. At the time of death we too will be given the joy! What joy? Why, the joy that comes by sitting beneath the throne of God and at Jesus' feet. No, we will not be placed on Christ's throne at God's right hand. But we will be before that throne day and night. And we will share in the glory and the love that are found in Christ and in God the Father.

And that, people of God, is joy! Heavenly bliss! The race will be over—no more running as we still must now. No more weariness, no more need to persevere. Our eternal rest will be attained.

We are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses! They surround us! Follow their example! Follow the example that Christ has left us, by which He became the very power unto eternal joy! Run the race! And when we grow weary, remember: God will supply us the strength in order that we can mount up with wings as eagles and fly along the way. We will run and not grow weary, and we shall walk and not faint! God give us that faith!

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

January 4, 2015
No. 3757

Watching for Christ's Return
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

The year 2015 is here. God has spared us to see another new year—a year that brings us just a bit closer to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

As with each new year, we look forward to another year of life in this world. But as we do, the Bible reminds us that we must also look forward to the coming of Christ in this new year. We may not place our affections and sights on the things of this world. This world does not last. It comes to an end and everything in it will perish! We must set our sights on that which is permanent—something that never ends. The kingdom of heaven awaits us.

This is the subject of the parable we consider today. Jesus speaks this parable in Matthew 25:1-13. There we read,

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While

the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

This parable speaks clearly of the coming of Christ, who is our bridegroom, and the need to watch for that coming diligently without growing weary. And that has everything to do with the new year that is upon us. In this year to come we must watch for Christ's coming! Whether

He actually arrives is not of the essence. We must still watch.

This is the second of three parables that Jesus spoke at this time. Christ had left Jerusalem the night before. He was finished warning her. On this particular day He spent His time alone with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. The next day Christ would be taken captive and led to the cross. It was of utmost importance that He forewarn His disciples about His second coming and the end of the world. When would He come? Of that day and hour no man knows. He comes quickly and suddenly, but *when* he comes no one knows. The first of the three parables Christ spoke warned of this. But in this parable Jesus now enjoins His people to watch for that return. He does it by means of a story of a wedding and ten virgins who were called to wait for the coming of the bridegroom. Again, this is a most fitting picture.

WATCHING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

I. The Coming of the Groom

Jesus describes a common event in this parable: a wedding. However, the type of wedding He describes is probably not all that familiar to us. According to the custom of Jesus' day, early in the morning of the wedding, the bridegroom and

a number of chosen friends would retreat to some unknown and secluded place. While they were gone, the bride would go with her maidens to the home of her future husband and there prepare the house and herself for the wedding. Late in the day, usually when it was turning dark, the bridegroom would return with his friends to meet his bride. It was this coming of the bridegroom that is the focus of attention for the wedding party. There was a person who was posted along the way who, at the sight of the returning bridegroom would cry out in warning to the bride and her maidens: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet him!" The maidens would then trim their lamps (light their lanterns) that would light the way, and they would escort the bride along the dark path that led to the meeting of the bridegroom. The bride and groom would then return the rest of the way with the bridal attendants amidst laughter and song. Once having returned to the house, the wedding ceremony would take place followed by the celebration.

Those were the activities of the wedding to which Christ refers in our text. Obviously, He does not concern Himself with the wedding ceremony as such or the wedding feast. He focuses our attention on what happens *before* the wedding. We learn

that works faith in us and He it is that will accomplish that faith in us, that is, bring it to its perfect end. If faith is our own work, as the Arminian loves to claim, then we will not run the race, because fallen man in Adam has no faith, much less desires to walk in faith. But Christ is the author of our faith.

He works faith in the hearts of His people. Christ sends forth His Spirit at the time of regeneration into the hearts of those whom God has chosen, and this Spirit works faith. It is that same Spirit of Christ that assures us and upholds us in that faith. Faith, therefore, not only in its beginning stages, but also in its every facet, is a work of Christ in us.

From beginning to end Christ upholds us in our faith, so that you and I cannot for a moment run apart from living in conscious connection with Christ. Peter tried it, and he sank beneath the waves and billows. We try it, and the moment we do we stumble into the way of sin. We may not take our eyes off Jesus! We can do all things only through Christ who strengthens us. He is the power that works in and through us to persevere. He gives us the strength to continue running in our race. And He is the one who brings us to the end of the race too. He not only is the author of faith but the finisher too. He

who has begun a good work in us will be faithful to complete it! We cannot reach the finish line without the strength found in Christ. If we think we can stand apart from His strength, if we think we can stand in our own righteousness, if we think we have the power in us to withstand temptation and perils, think again! We will stumble in our pride and we will never complete the race! Faith always draws the believer to Christ and Him alone.

And in Christ is found the strength to run because Christ Himself ran the race. Not that we place Christ on a par with us. We look to Him as the author and finisher of *our* faith. He sets us on the path and He brings us to the end. But nevertheless, Christ ran the race too. We read in verse 2, the last part: "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Here is what the writer to the Hebrews wants us to picture. Before Christ stood the prize, that is, the joy that would be His at God's right hand.

To gain that prize, however, Christ was called to endure the cross and the shame He would have to bear. That race Christ ran required endurance and perseverance, because He had to suffer the wrath of God against our sin and shame. He

hard and then our sin ensnares us and we stumble. We start to slow down. Sin presses on us and we get winded. Our feet are now just plodding along in life. Phooey! I quit! I give up. Why even try to live a godly life? Why even try to resist temptation? I cannot seem to run the race hard enough. I'll never make it to heaven anyway! I give up. Then I go with those I do not belong with and give in to my sinful flesh and the temptations set before me.

No! God's Word says to us today! No! You may not give in! You must keep on running the race of faith. You must run with patience. You must persevere and not grow weary. You must run and keep

on running. I know you maybe winded, I know your spiritual muscles

might ache, I know that the desire is simply to give up and go along with the others in the way of sin. But that is not an option. It is a command of God to you and me, brothers and sisters in the Lord. You see that cloud of witnesses given us in Hebrews 11? Do you see the race they ran? Do you see their faith? Look at what they did through faith! We, fellow believers, stand among these people of faith. God has worked in us that same faith! If they

could run the race and obtain the prize, so can we! Run!

II. Our Only Strength

But if we are to run successfully, we must bear something in mind. We cannot run, we cannot make it through even one leg of the race, if we do not look unto Jesus. Faith is of such a nature that it looks away from self and to our Savior. If we are to run the race of faith, then our spiritual eyes must be fixed on Jesus alone. Faith, you understand, is that work of God by which He binds us to our Savior. Faith therefore unites us inseparably with Christ. But when exercising that faith, it is so easy for us to look away from

Christ. And then we try to find strength from within ourselves to run the race

rather than from without. That is exactly what the wicked unbelieving world tells us we have to do. All the power and all the ability to do anything, the wicked say, is found within man. The believer, however, does not look for strength to press on in himself, but he looks outside himself.

You and I in our race of faith must look to Jesus, because all of our strength, all of our ability to run, is found in Him alone. Why? Because He is the author and finisher of our faith. He it is

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of the coming of the bridegroom and the coming of the bride to meet him.

But this is not all. Christ focuses our attention primarily on the maidens of the bride who were called to carry their lamps to light the way. There were ten maidens, all of whom, of course, represented the bride. They belonged to her wedding party and were therefore representative of her. These maidens were virgins. They were pure and unspotted young ladies who had kept themselves from fornication. It was not as if these young maidens were an exception to the rule. Unmarried women are called to remain pure and chaste. These virgins were not called so by Christ, therefore, because they were an exception to the rule. But they are called virgins because, as such, they represented the bride herself, who was pure and holy.

Yet, these details, though necessary to the parable, as we will see, are not what attracts our attention to these ten virgins. What does is the action of these virgins as regards their lamps. Five of them were wise, in that, prior to the return of the bridegroom, they had seen to it that their lamps were filled with oil. They were therefore ready for the return of the bridegroom. The call that he was returning did not catch them unprepared. On the other hand, there were

five foolish virgins. These young ladies squandered their day and failed even to take any thought to their lamps, which were empty. When the call that the bridegroom was coming rang forth, they were not ready to meet him. In their foolishness, they asked the wise maidens for oil from their lamps. These virgins answered them, "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." The foolish virgins then ran to get oil, but by the time they returned, the bridegroom had come and was gone. The wedding had already begun and the doors to the house were shut and locked. When these foolish virgins then tried to enter, they were turned away. They had not been true friends of the bridegroom. They had been poor representatives of the bride. So, the answer was harsh to them: "I know you not!" They did not enter into the great wedding of that day.

It is not hard for us to understand the spiritual significance of this parable. Christ gives this warning in verse 13, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." This parable is meant to say something to us about Christ's return. The wedding represents the marriage of the church and Christ. Christ is portrayed in various places in Scripture as a

bridegroom. Both Old and New Testaments make extensive references either to God or to Christ as the bridegroom and to the church as the bride.

That, of course, is the significance of the ten virgins as well. Though the bride is not mentioned in particular in this parable, nevertheless the maidens here represent the bride. Together they make up the party of the bride. Therefore, these virgins signify the church. This is why they are referred to as virgins. They are holy and unspotted—pure. So also is the church. The church is pure and holy—unspotted with the filth and disobedience of unbelief. The church is a body of people God has called out of the darkness of this world and cleansed and sanctified in the blood of Christ. She is, therefore, a virgin—consecrated and dedicated to be holy unto God. She is also the wife to Christ. She loves Him and obeys Him and cherishes Him as the apple of her eye. This chastity of the church, of course, is found in the fact that Christ has died for her and made her holy. But she is holy—in Christ. She is pure and undefiled. A virgin. So we have a picture of the relationship of Christ and the church.

The wedding itself refers to that time when all of the church will be gathered in to that great wedding feast at the end of time.

When the bridegroom, Jesus Christ returns, at the end of time, He and His church will be united in marriage. During the period of the New Testament, Christ, the bridegroom, is in heaven. He is, as it were, in that secluded place which we cannot yet find. At the end of time He leaves his throne in heaven and returns to earth to take His bride with Him to heaven and there celebrate eternally with her. But that return of Christ does not come without warning. The cry rings out through the ages, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Go ye to meet Him!” The church itself cries out this warning through the preaching of the gospel—that cry is heard today at the outset of the year 2015. So the events of this wedding and the coming of the bridegroom fit this great spiritual truth well.

So also does the symbolism that surrounds the ten virgins: five wise and five foolish. The number ten makes reference to the church in her entirety, in her completeness. God calls His church out of this world, and every member of that church is chosen by Him. He sees and knows that church as a whole. But there are five foolish virgins that make up that church as well as five wise virgins. Obviously, not all of these virgins were believers. The parable therefore considers Christ’s church from the viewpoint of the church as

diculous? By nature he would have liked to stop running the race of faith. Do you think Moses, when leading the children of Israel through the wilderness, did not oftentimes desire to walk away from it all and give up. They were so unthankful and unholy! Do you not think that the saints we spoke of in the last couple of broadcasts had times in their lives when they wished to give up and quit running?

A life of faith is not an easy one to live! The race is long, and so very, very difficult at times. This is why we are called by God, when we are admonished here in our text, to lay aside every weight—namely, the sin that doth so easily beset us! That is the one weight that far too often we fail even to realize that we carry with us when we run. It is a heavy weight that slows us way down. In fact, it is the weight of that sin that oftentimes makes us want to quit and give up. When the verses we consider speak of the weight of sin, they are not talking about the heavy burden of guilt that we must struggle with every day. That also is a burden that wearies the child of God. But the inspired writer has in mind the sin that far too often gets in the way of running the race of faith in this world. Sin sidetracks us. Sin makes us lose our concentration or makes us want to sit down and rest for a little while.

Is that not so true? We can sit in church on the Lord’s Day and be fed by God’s Word. As a result, we set out in the new week with high expectations. Then we get into Monday and suddenly there are those same evil desires of our sinful flesh. We covet, we lust, we get angry, jealous, envious. And as the week progresses the Word of God we heard on Sunday begins to fade. Slowly but surely those expectations of faith that we set out to accomplish at the beginning of the week begin to wane, and by the end of the week it seems we are barely trudging along in the paths of God! The reason for that is our sin. Our sinful flesh hangs on us as extra baggage and it slows us down in the race. The sin of the world grabs out at us as we run by and seeks to pull us off track. The wicked tell us there is a better way, an easier way to run. The way they want us to run is much more fun. It is not nearly as strenuous, because it does not require faith to run in it!

That is why we have in Hebrews 12:1 an addition to the admonition we receive: let us run *with patience* the race set before us. That word “patience” here actually means “endurance.” It speaks of perseverance, that is, with the will in us not to give up! Again, the Word of God here hits the nail right on the head! We set out running

he believes. When the child of God is told of his own salvation in the blood of Jesus Christ, he believes. Because of this a whole new life is spread before him. It is a life that is in principle different from that of the unregenerate man. It is no longer under the slavery of unbelief. Now his whole life is motivated by and governed by faith. That life of faith is what the writer to the Hebrews compares to running a race. From the moment we are regenerated and given the gift of faith, to the end of our lives, when we die, we are running a race. And it is a long-distance race. We are in it for the long haul. It is not a quick sprint and we are finished. It is a marathon.

Throughout our lives in this sinful world, we are called upon to exercise our faith, to live out of that principle of faith. Oftentimes God puts that faith to the test! There are many hills on which to run, and valleys where life seems so dark and perilous. There are rocky ways in this life as well as sudden turns that we do not anticipate. The path laid out for us in this sin-cursed world is one filled with dangers and perils—sickness, death, temptations, persecutions, and battles. What is more, we face every day the running—just the plain everyday exertion of run-

ning the race. And it can grow so wearisome! Just running itself can become so monotonous! To keep our spiritual lives not only at an even keel, but to keep our faith, our trust in God and in Jesus Christ, strong and at a high level is so difficult. That is the race of faith we are called to run in this life. We must run every day in the conscious knowledge and confidence that God is our God and Jesus Christ is our Savior.

This is why we receive the admonition of our text: “Let us

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run the race that is set before us!” This race is not optional. It is not a race that we may walk through lazily. It is not one in which we can

stop along the way and rest. We may not be spiritual slouches in this race! We are commanded in our text to run it and to keep on running it. The tendency of the believer is to start that race with vigor, but once the way gets a little rough to give up on it! He quickly—too quickly—gives up and stops running and gives in to the temptation around him. And the admonition we receive, dear fellow saint, is: Do not stop running! Do you think it was easy for Noah while he built the ark to hear for 120 long years people mock and scorn him for something that seemed so ri-

institute. The church as she becomes manifest in this world in the church institute is not made up exclusively of believers. Into the church creep foolish virgins who look like church and act like church but which are in fact unbelievers. During the development of the church in this world they are mixed together with those who believe. But in the end of time the door to heaven is shut against them. Though they called themselves church, they were not concerned about the coming of Christ.

II. The Need to Watch

But we want to back up a moment and consider the most important aspect of this parable. As we enter into the new year we hear the clarion call: “Behold, the bridegroom cometh!” Christ warns us, in verse 13: “Watch, because you do not know the day or the hour when Christ returns.”

There is an urgency to this call—a real urgency that Jesus points out in the parable. We read in verses 5, 6: “While the bridegroom tarried, [the virgins] all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.” It was midnight already and the bridegroom had not yet come. He tarried. The bridegroom was supposed to return when it was just turning dark at the

beginning of the evening. But this bridegroom tarried. He waited until the stroke of midnight. Things were dark, and most people were in bed and fast asleep. All ten of these virgins fell asleep too, both the foolish and the wise. They awoke only at the sound of the cry.

We hear the shout today: Christ comes! But we have been waiting a long time for that return, haven’t we? Christ told us some 2,000 years ago that He would come again. But He has not come. And the times are getting pretty dark too. The night of unbelief and sin surrounds us. The temptations of this world and all its allurements and comforts surround us. It is so easy for us to fall asleep to things spiritual, is it not? It is so easy to place our sights on the things here below and to forget about this one important fact: the bridegroom comes! So, we slowly nod off to sleep and we no longer are attuned to things of the kingdom of heaven! Well, the call goes forth at the beginning of the new year: “Behold!” Wake up and open your eyes! Look and see: Christ is coming! When that call goes forth, then we do wake up. We rise out of our slumber and remember why we are waiting. We go forth to meet the bridegroom.

All the virgins slept. Oh yes, even believers have a tendency to doze off while waiting

for Christ's return. That is not good, but it is true. Yet they are wise! How so? Their lamps are trimmed! They have oil in them. They are prepared to meet their bridegroom. They shake the sleep from their eyes when they hear the call and they go forth spiritually prepared to meet the bridegroom. This is what must characterize us in this new year, fellow believers! We must hear the call and be prepared.

How are we to be prepared for the coming of Christ, our bridegroom? First of all, we are to watch for His coming! That is what Christ enjoins us at the end of this parable. You see, there are various signs of Christ's coming for which we need to watch. There are signs in nature we must watch. We must see them in the great disasters that befall our world. There are signs in the nations, both in government and in society. We must see the abounding lawlessness and the wars and threats of wars. We must see how this world in which we live is heading toward the development of that worldwide kingdom of man we call antichrist. There are signs in the church. The gospel is being preached throughout the world on the one hand, and, on the other, there is abounding apostasy. These too will tend toward the development of the antichrist! We must keep our eyes open to these signs and be spiritually sensitive to them.

But there is another way in which we must be prepared for the coming of Christ. The church and her saints must live as a virgin! We must keep ourselves holy and chaste before our God. We may not fornicate with the gods of our present society and world. We may not serve the heathen idols of the wicked, nor may we serve the money and the luxuries of our present society. We may not compromise with error and lie. We may not walk in the sin and unbelief of our present society. We must remain holy unto the Lord. And this applies to every area of our lives! On the contrary, we must keep our eyes focused on heaven and the life that awaits us there. That is where our affections must be placed in this year to come.

That, then, is how we must prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ in the year to come. It is not something we do in the far off future. It is something we do in 2015! We watch for the signs, and we live as a holy people in this world! That is our calling in 2015. "Behold, the bridegroom comes! Go out to meet Him!"

Certainly, we may not be as the foolish virgins, who failed to prepare themselves for the coming of the bridegroom. They had all day. All day they could have gone and filled their lamps. But they waited, and then fell asleep without at all preparing

set, the writer to the Hebrews uses the example of a runner in a race to picture for us our life as believers in this world. And the particular reference he makes is that of a marathon runner. This runner is not a short-distance runner. He runs a long-distance race. A race of this sort requires a lot of stamina. It is not won within a matter of seconds, but it takes hours. He must set himself a pace—a worthy pace—and follow that pace until the end of the race, if he is going to cross the finish line to win the prize. A wise runner in such a race is also a person who knows that to be competitive he must wear the proper attire. We have all seen joggers; or perhaps we have even watched a marathon race. The attire of such runners is minimal. They are dressed in lightweight shorts as well as a sleeveless shirt, which also is as light as possible. Neither does the wise runner take anything with him. He does not carry a water bottle or head gear or heavy tennis shoes. He lays aside every weight that would hinder him from running the race as swiftly and surely as possible.

And one other thing is true of a runner of this sort: endurance. He is one who perseveres. He knows the race is not going to be over immediately. He patiently endures the sweating, the aching muscles as they warm up, the heavy breathing

he will have for the extent of the race. And he runs. He runs without letting up and without quitting! He runs. Sound wearying?

Well, that is the race that every one of God's people runs. Every true believer runs this race. Not physically, of course. The writer to the Hebrews has in mind a spiritual race. It is the race of faith. That is the real subject that underlies our text this evening—faith. That is what Hebrews 11 is all about—those men and women who exhibited great faith in their lives. You see, when the child of God is regenerated, that is, brought from spiritual death to spiritual life, then at that moment he or she is grafted into Christ. God binds them to Christ in such a way that the life of Christ flows forth out of Him into that otherwise dead person. In that way the person is graciously given by God the life of Christ. This power by which the dead sinner is now grafted into Christ is the power of faith.

When that power is worked in the heart of a person, then that faith also comes to manifestation in his or her life. He is given spiritual eyes and ears so that when he sees and hears of the things of the kingdom of heaven he believes in them. When the child of God is told of God and God's mighty works in creation and in salvation,

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*January 25, 2015
No. 3760*

*Patiently Run the Race
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Did you ever run in a race? Not just a short sprint of a hundred meters or so, but a long-distance race? This was and still is an event in the Olympics that is held yet today. And it is this figure that the writer to the Hebrews uses in Hebrews 12: 1, 2. Let me read that to you:

Therefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The figure used here teaches us an important spiritual truth. The writer to the Hebrews compares our lives in this world to running a race. The writer to the Hebrews teaches us what we must do if we are going to finish that race successfully. So, we have before us today a passage that gives much strength and encouragement

to God's people. It gives us the necessary impetus to keep us running the wearisome race we call life. Actually, we found this encouragement already in the few verses we were studying in the last two broadcasts in connection with Hebrews 11. We considered a few men and women who exhibited faith in their lives. God required of them some extraordinary deeds that indeed tested their faith—some of them sorely. As a result, they become for us examples of faith. The Word of God we consider today tells us concerning these saints that we today are compassed about (that is, surrounded) with this cloud of witnesses. They are all around us, and we stand with them. Together we are people of faith who walk not by sight. And we therefore stand among this cloud of witnesses and are exhorted unto faithfulness. The idea is that if they were by God's grace able to stand by faith, so can we.

***PATIENTLY RUN
THE RACE***

I. The Urgent Command

As we mentioned at the out-

themselves for the coming of the bridegroom. Maybe they had a false conception of the coming of the bridegroom. Who knows? Certainly they did not take seriously the fact that the bridegroom tarried. They did not prepare for his return. So also there are the foolish in the church today. They are warned just as everyone else. But these people are foolish. A wise person knows the reality and adapts his life to fit that reality. He knows Christ returns so he adapts the way he lives to watch for that return. But a foolish person in the church knows the reality that Christ returns, but fails to adapt his lifestyle in the world to conform to that reality. Instead of watching for the signs, he is naive to it all. He does not look around him with discerning eyes at all. Sometimes such people are totally indifferent to the return of Christ and the end of the world. Ah, the end of time and Christ's return is not for thousands of years yet, they think! There is no spiritual perception. They do not worry themselves over Christ's return. They do not have the spiritual eyes to see how this world and everything in it is quickly funneling toward that return of Christ and the end of the world.

Others refuse to lead a chaste and holy life. They become totally caught up in the riches and pleasures and even the lusts of this present

life. Instead of separating themselves from the world, they blend themselves together with the world. This is what makes them so foolish. For that reason, when Christ comes they will not be prepared or watching. Christ's coming will catch them unawares.

III. The Fruit of Watching

That was indeed the end of the foolish virgins: the door was shut to them. They could not enter into the wedding feast. And when they said something to the doorkeeper, the voice was heard, "I know you not!" Their end was utter destruction and darkness.

But the fruit of watching in this year to come is the joy of entering into the wedding feast! That wedding celebration of Christ and His church will take place in heaven when Christ returns again. This present world will be destroyed when He returns, and a new heavens and earth will be ushered in. There God's people will eat and drink around the table set for them at the wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride. Watch, people of God! Christ comes! And when He does, hear him say: Enter into the joy of my rest!

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*January 11, 2015
No. 3758*

*Faith: Strength to Endure (1)
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Hebrews 11 is a well-known chapter of the Bible. It is so because it lists for us in a succinct way the memorable acts of many Old Testament believers. It points out to us that all of their deeds were the fruit of a true and living faith. There can be no doubt in our minds, when we reach the end of this chapter, about that faith to which the lives of these saints point us. They were living examples of faith. But it is so important today to understand what the faith that characterized these people is.

In today's society lots of people talk about faith. But faith to them includes anything and everything that is religious in character. Even in the Christian church there is a horrible misunderstanding, even in some cases a deliberate redefining of the whole idea of faith. Faith is a blind acceptance of things. It is a feeling or a heroic deed. It is performing great deeds for Christ. When asked what faith is, one is hard pressed to define it because, to many, faith has no one in whom a person believes.

So, in the next two broadcasts we intend to examine a few examples of faith in order to determine what faith is.

We read in Hebrews 11:32-39:

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. 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 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

an open field. As it grows, its roots dig deeply into the soil. When the winds blow across that open field, at times fiercely, that little sapling bends beneath the force of the wind. But it is not uprooted! So also the believer. When the winds of life blow on us, when hardships confront us, we do not give in and say, I cannot do it, I cannot live out my faith. No, his roots of faith dig the deeper into Jesus Christ and he bends and endures the storms of life. The saints in the passage we consider endured the fiercest of circumstances in life and they persevered. So also are we called unto quiet, brave endurance in the various circumstances of life. We can endure because our roots are dug into Jesus Christ. Christ preserves His people, and we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

II. The Comfort of Faith

And there is where we also find our comfort—the comfort of faith. In all these things we belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who so preserves us that not a hair can fall from our heads, and so that all things

are subservient to our salvation. We belong to Christ both as to body and soul. We belong to Him in life and in death. We are His. No one will pluck us out of His hand. We believe that! We know that, and we are convinced that this is true. For that reason we find in Him our only comfort in life and in death, even when horrible atrocities may befall us by the hands of wicked men. Christ has won for us the victory over our enemies.

But what is even better is that, belonging to Jesus, we also belong to the living God of heaven and earth. He holds all things in His hands and directs them exactly as He

will. He will take care of us, being almighty God and a faithful Father. “Who will separate us from the love of God in Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” No one and nothing will separate us from that love of God. This is the confession we make with God's saints in Hebrews 11. I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. May we go forth in that faith!

*We can endure because
our roots are dug
into Jesus Christ.*

He holds all
things in His
hands and
directs them
exactly as He

their hearts. They confessed it before men and lived it before men. This is exactly why they were persecuted the way they were. This is exactly why God gave them boldness where there would have been weakness. Faith will always show itself in the life of the child of God. Does your faith show? Do others see it? Can you talk about it? Are the places to which you go and the deeds you perform evidence of faith? Faith is not something that can be hidden. Neither may it be. Jesus says:

He that confesses Me before men I will confess before My Father in heaven. Likewise, he that denies Me before men, him will I deny before My Father in heaven.

What this passage before us does *not* teach, however, is that God expects us to go out and do great heroic deeds for Christ. God expects us to live out of faith in our everyday lives. When a believing mother lives her, at times, hum-drum life in the home caring for her children and husband, she is living in faith. When she is home instructing her children while father is eking out a living for his family, she is living out of faith. When a believing father goes out and labors hard and honestly in his job in order to

provide for his children, he is living in faith. When he comes home after his hard day of work because there is no place where he would rather be, and there he continues the instruction of his children and support of his wife, then he lives out of faith.

Why can we say this? Because he is fulfilling what God has taught him to do in the Bible—the objective content of faith. When he takes his family to church, frequenting the house of God, even though at times it may be

difficult or even inconvenient, he is living out his faith. Why? Because Scripture instructs him in this calling. The objective content of faith is the Word of God, and it teaches us what we are to believe and how we are to live it out in our lives—in the home, church, labor, school, in this world. The works of faith are found in the little things we do each day of our lives—the deeds that flow out of our conviction that these are the things I must do for the sake of the kingdom. This faith is not showy, it is not an exhibition or a performance that we put on for others to see.

And this faith will result in endurance. To endure means the ability to bear up under something. I am reminded of a small sapling that finds root in

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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.

We will find that the men and women spoken of here are not some special kind of people who stand in a class of their own. They are not heroes of faith who lived a life that we can never hope to achieve. The men and women of this passage belong to that cloud of witnesses who teach you and me what must characterize us in our lives. That is the entire point of Hebrews 11. These people lived by faith. Their lives reveal what true faith is. The point of this passage is not for us to stand in awe at what these saints were able to achieve in their lives, but, rather, to incite us to live in faith in this present wicked world. These verses place us right before the question: Where stands my faith?

**FAITH:
STRENGTH TO ENDURE**
**I. The Endurance of
Faith**

Every business has what is called a “job assessment” or “evaluation.” Those who work for the company are examined to determine whether they are doing the business good. Their attitude and faithfulness to the

business is assessed. A report is then filed—sometimes a bad report and sometimes a good report, depending on the individual and his labors. Well, our text informs us in verse 39 concerning the saints of this particular chapter and of our text, “all these having received a good report.” These received a good report—not before mere men, mind you, but before God.

In God’s evaluation these saints gained through faith a good report. It was not merely on account of their deeds, you see, but their deeds revealed something deeper in them: they were men and women of faith. It is faith that stands on the foreground in the verse we consider. Verse 33 begins that way: “Who through faith...” we read. It was by means of faith that the witnesses of our text were able to receive strength to endure some of the cruelest tortures and deprivations possible. In other words, by means of faith a child of God is able to endure. Faith gives a spiritual strength even to people who by nature might be timid and afraid. It is this truth that the passage before us in all of its examples points out to us.

We cannot consider this Word of God before us without going through the list of examples we have. We look at these examples knowing that the deeds of these saints were the fruit

of faith and that by them they obtained a good report of God. They were seen to be faithful, enthusiastic, and fruitful citizens of God's kingdom.

The examples listed for us in our text today begin with those men listed for us in verse 32: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephtha, David, and Samuel. These men, we are told in verse 33, through faith subdued kingdoms. We think of the Judges: Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, Samson, and Samuel and those fought by King David. By means of those battles heathen kingdoms were subdued. These same men in their rule over God's people wrought righteousness—that is to say, their rules were just, standing in accordance with God's commandments.

The writer to the Hebrews continues: these men obtained the promises of the covenant. We will discover how in a moment. We are reminded of Samson in the last phrase of verse 33—how he by means of the strength God gave him was able to stop the mouth of a lion. We are reminded of Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace when we read in verse 34 of "quenching the violence of fire." By the next phrase we are reminded of David escaping the edge of the sword of Goliath or of Saul.

These are the first six out of the nine examples given us in

verses 33 and 34. With the last three of the set nine examples we find a little shift in viewpoint. These last three build on each other to explain somewhat how these men were able accomplish what they did. Out of weakness God made these men strong, so strong that they became brave (waxed valiant) in fight, so brave that they were able to turn to flight the armies of aliens, the foreigners who sought to take away their inheritance. You know, the tendency we have here in our text is to look at these men in Hebrews 11 as being the epitome of bravery and strength. They were heroes of faith. They stand on a plain so much higher than we do. We could never achieve what they did! But our text points out that they were not by nature strong and brave! Gideon was a farmer's son and he told God that he was not capable of leading an army against the Midianites. Barak did not dare to go and fight the Canaanites unless Deborah went with him. These men were common, ordinary men to whom God appeared and gave strength to go and fight. Out of weakness God made strong, and out of a timid nature God made brave. And God did this by working in these saints' faith!

That is the first set of examples given us in the verses we consider. That ends the first sentence of our text. These first nine examples refer to those

are thoroughly convicted that this world is fallen into sin and that the only way to reach that city is by means of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are the citizens of God's kingdom in this world. We represent His cause. And we know and are persuaded in our hearts that one day Christ will come again and we will receive our place in heaven.

Faith has content, you see!

The content of faith is the Word of God. The more we know and understand the Scrip-

tures the stronger will be our faith. The less we know, the weaker is our faith. And we ought never to assume that we have attained unto that knowledge and need not study God's Word much anymore. Faith is the persuasion that everything contained in the Old and New Testaments is true and will be fulfilled. Faith is the conviction that I will believe that, no matter who tries to make me deny it. I will maintain it in the face of those who mock me, torment me, hurt me, and even kill me. What God's Word has taught me has become my life! The God in whom I believe is the God who has entered into covenant with me. He has told me together with His church, "I am your God, and you are my son or daughter!"

God has bound me together with Him in love. He shares with me His blessings. He smiles upon me in His favor.

And since I know and am persuaded that God is the almighty, sovereign God who holds all things in His hand and directs them to accomplish His will, then I am convicted that if He is for me, nothing can be against me. Faith has content! If that great God is for us, nothing can be

against us. He works all things together for our good. We are con-

vinced of that.

When united to Christ by a true and living faith, we will walk in thankfulness and obedience to God. We will fear Him and keep His commandments. Faith is not the fruit itself, of course; the fruit flows out of the fact that we are grafted into Christ. It is not the grafting itself. Fruit is produced only out of the life of Christ that flows forth into us. The fruit is a work of God's grace and Spirit in us, sanctifying us. But those who have faith do bring forth good works in their lives. That is the point of the passage before us here in Hebrews. These saints brought forth good works that became evident for all to see. Their faith was not hidden in

*The more we know
and understand the Scriptures
the stronger will be our faith.*

full of doctrine with which they express agreement.

Faith, however, is a conviction that those truths we know are, in fact, the gospel of salvation! They are truths that have turned my life around. Truths that motivate me in my life in the way that I live. They are truths that give me the confidence that I belong to God and to Jesus Christ.

And I will give my all to serve them! My love for them is rooted in what I have been taught in God's Word. And I love them with my heart, mind, soul, and strength! No matter what may befall me I know they will never leave me. And I, for that reason, will not forsake them either, to walk in the sins of this world! What I believe is not just a preference. It is a conviction that makes me do what I do in this life. I will not share in the sins of the wicked. I will not seek out the friendships of ungodly men who despise God's commandments. And I will resist unto death those who will attempt to lure me from or force me to turn away from God and His kingdom! That is faith! That is what motivated these witnesses of Hebrews 11.

This means that faith has an object. We cannot simply believe without believing *in* someone. The wicked world does that in their ads, movies, and slogans. "Just believe," it is said. Be-

lieve in what or whom? Faith always has an object, whether unbelieving man wants to verbalize it or not. And the object of fallen man's faith is man himself! Believe in yourself, in your own innate ability, and you will be able to accomplish whatever you want. I bow the knee to society and whatever it thinks. In contrast to this, the believer knows and places all his confidence in God and in His Son Jesus Christ. God and His Son were the objects of the faith of this cloud of witnesses given us here in Hebrews. Hebrews 11:6: "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." These saints had received the promise of the coming Messiah and they clung to that promise. They hoped for His coming. So the object of the faith of the true believer is God and His Son.

And we are convicted. "Faith is the conviction of things not seen!" We are convinced in our hearts that God is God and that He stands above all things in His majesty and He rules the nations by His might. Though we cannot see it with the eye, we are convicted in heart and soul that there is better country than this world, that is, a heavenly one. We in hope look for that city whose builder and maker is God. In that conviction we live as pilgrims and strangers in this world of darkness and sin. We

mentioned in verse 32. But the second set of nine examples goes beyond these men. They apply to many different saints of God who lived in the both Old and New Testament times. These examples refer to those who have been persecuted for the sake of Christ. The first example is given us in verse 35: "Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection." It may be true that in a few instances those who were put to death for Christ's sake were raised again. But this has not been the norm. Women have seen their husbands and children put to death before their very eyes for the cause of Christ. Young women themselves have been beaten, raped, and then hung on crosses naked for everyone to gawk at. They did not look to be raised miraculously to life again. They did not accept death thinking that somehow they would be raised from the dead and back into this life. They died in order that they might obtain a better resurrection, that is, the resurrection unto eternal life that will take place at the end of time. They died in hope of that resurrection.

Still others, according to verse 36, had trials or tests of cruel mockings and scourgings. Men and women were brought before magistrates and mocked

and whipped simply because they believed in Jesus Christ. They were put in chains and thrown into prison to rot there and never to see the light of day again—because they confessed their Savior.

Then the persecutions become even more violent and cruel. We read in verse 37: "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." They were stoned to death by their fellow countrymen. They were sliced in pieces or sawn asunder, beheaded. They were tempted, that is trial by fire. They were burned at the stake. They were slain with the sword, a reference to the impulsive behavior of an angry soldier or judge. Soldiers would angrily pull out their sword and stick it into the belly of one they had captured. All of this, dear saints, happened to people because they believed in God and in His Son Jesus Christ.

Then finally the conclusion to the list: there were those who were stripped of all their belongings and cast out. These wandered about not in the nice fancy clothes of class and culture, but in sheepskins and goatskins. They were destitute, that is penniless, in constant lack of food and drink. They were afflicted or hard-pressed. They were

tormented or treated as scum and filth. Why? Because they believed in God. They wandered in deserts and in mountains, living in dens and caves! They were forced to live like animals. If one looked at them, he could not help but pity them. But then, they need not be pitied because the world was not worthy of such saints! These outcasts, these scum in men's eyes, were the great and the noble of the earth in the eyes of God! The world of men was not worthy of such people! These men and women were out of weakness made strong and brave.

And they were willing to endure all things for the sake of Christ. You see, God had given them a promise! God had entered into covenant with them, and that covenant contained promises. Some of those promises, such as the land of Canaan they were able to obtain (reference is made to this in verse 33, where we are told they obtained promises). But there was and is yet one central promise of the covenant. That promise was the coming of Jesus Christ—their Messiah. That Messiah God's people looked for and longed for and waited for with the greatest of patience even when the heathen raged against them. They looked for Him even when their own nation turned on them and persecuted them for still believing in Him. They had the promise of His coming and they

looked for Him because *salvation was to be found in Him!!!!* Eternal life—life in the glorious kingdom of heaven—was to be found in Him. There was no other way! They longed for that Messiah because they needed Him! And if it meant torture or death that they hoped for Him, then so be it! Nothing would turn them from their hope that He was coming and that when He came He would be strong to save them from their sin and misery and give them the joy of eternity! What is so striking in all of this is that “these all, having obtained a good report through faith, *received not the promise!*” Unbelievable! They never saw the coming of that Messiah! But so much did they believe in Him that they would suffer and die on His behalf.

Now, I want to make a comparison today between the saints recorded here and you and me today. I mean, this passage is not given us simply to tell us some interesting and exciting facts about the faith of the Old Testament saints. It is given us for our benefit. It is given both to admonish and to encourage us in our walk of faith today. So, what is necessary in this Word of God is to make a comparison between these saints and us. Ah! The mention of comparing ourselves with these saints already makes us squirm a bit, does it not? Who can be compared with people of such great faith as these? Listen

gift of God! And it is bestowed by God only on certain individuals. Not everyone is given this gift by God. Only those whom God has ordained to eternal life will believe (Acts 13:48). Only those whom God chooses are given faith. So, where does faith find its source? God implants it into a man's heart. Christ has earned this gift for us through His death and resurrection. And the Spirit of Christ gives it to those for whom Christ died. Faith, then, is a work of God's grace in the heart of an elect sinner. And by means of that work of God's grace, the elect sinner is grafted into Jesus Christ, that is, he is bound by faith to Christ and becomes one in Christ. He becomes a member of Christ's body, and as a result the life of Christ flows forth into him. That life of Christ is indispensable, absolutely necessary, for the activity of faith that is found in the heart of a believer. No Christ? No faith. Faith is not an innate ability of man. Faith cannot be exhibited in the life of a person until Christ performs His work in us by His Spirit.

But when God works faith in us it activates, empowers, our hearts and minds. It works in me a certain knowledge by which I hold as true everything contained in God's Word. And it works in me a confidence and conviction that God is my God and I am one of His children,

whom He loves and saves from sin. The activity of faith is knowledge and confidence. Faith is the confidence in things hoped for. Faith is not an emotion. It is not a feeling. Faith is not that emotional high that people are pushed to in revival meetings. Faith is not this warm, fuzzy feeling that I can experience at times in my life when I hear a heartwarming song or a sad story of a saint that has overcome some horrible malady. I am not saying, of course, that faith cannot affect our feelings or emotions. But faith is not a feeling. It is much more stable than feelings.

Faith is knowledge. Paul writes to Timothy in II Timothy 1:12: “For I *know* whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able.” Faith in this verse speaks of knowledge and persuasion. God explains to His people in Jeremiah 9:24: “Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he *understands* and *knows* me.” So faith is objective knowledge—knowledge that is rooted in the Word of God. But faith is not only objective knowledge. It is not merely a cold, intellectual acceptance of the truths of the Bible. There is many a person that has died with a head full of knowledge but with no conviction. There are those who think that a mere knowledge of the Bible will save them. They need not worry about how they live so long as they have a head

admonishes us to exhibit that same faith today in the dark days in which we live. It is that faith we wish to consider in detail today.

But we are encouraged by these believers too. The faith that characterized them also characterizes us. This passage is a testimony to us of faith. In the last broadcast we examined the actions of faith. But we said that these actions flowed out of faith because of what faith is. That is where we left it. We did not fully define faith and look at its character in order to see what motivated these saints. That we do today.

**FAITH:
STRENGTH TO ENDURE**

I. The Character of Faith

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” That is how the writer to the Hebrews defines faith for us in verse 1 of Hebrews 11. And such truly is faith. But this describes faith only from a particular point of view, and we need to have the whole picture before us to understand the actions of the saints in these verses we consider. You see, Hebrews defines faith from a certain perspective: faith is an action of man. And it is! Faith is the substance of things hoped for, or literally it is *the firm confidence* in those things we hope

for. Faith is evidence, or better, *the conviction* regarding things not seen. Faith is confidence and conviction. These are the activities of a man’s heart and soul. Faith therefore is an action of man.

But the question needs to be asked: Where does this faith come from? Where does the confidence and conviction that motivates a man in his life find its source? The answer is clear enough from Scripture: Faith is a gift of God that He imparts upon His elect people through the Spirit of Christ. We read in Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Faith is a gift. In Philippians 1:29 the apostle teaches: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe on him.” We are given to believe in Christ. In John’s gospel account, chapter 12:37, John does not mince any words when explaining why after having performed so many miracles people still not believe in Jesus. He explains in verse 39, “They could not believe!” They could not! It is impossible for a man to believe unless God works in him faith. Then John quotes Isaiah, “God hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts.”

Faith, therefore, must be a

again: the men and women of our text were common, ordinary, simple folk as we are. No different at all. Just men, women, and children who had a life just like we do before being cast into cruel trials and temptations.

So, we make the comparison. When we do, we see first of all our own present weakness—at least we should. These bold examples of faith only serve to make our lack of faith so glaring! We who live in this age of prosperity are so weak. We are so because we are surrounded with the pleasures and treasures of this world. As a result our sights are not set on the heavenly as they should be. We live so much for the earthly that our hope grows dim. While these saints before us wandered about in sheepskins and lived in caves and dens of the earth, we live for our fancy clothing and our more than comfortable homes. While they fought the great battles of faith with real and ferocious enemies, we are taken in by, even enamored with, the wicked world. While they were sawn in pieces and burned at the stake and stoned, we hold hands with the wicked and join them in their entertainment. What spiritually weak lives we live! It is true that we are puny in comparison to these saints of faith—not because those people were any different than we are, but because we in our society today have lost our focus.

Perhaps God sends on us as believers a light affliction. Sometimes we are shunned for our faith. Sometimes people look at us sideways because they think our lifestyle is strange and our goals different from theirs. And we convince ourselves that we endure so much for Christ! Others feel that by their deeds of mercy they are doing great deeds of faith for Christ’s sake! All that pales in comparison to the testimony that these saints here in Hebrews 11 leave us! We have not resisted unto blood striving against sin! Christ did! He suffered the cruel torture of rejection and the hatred of the church. He was beaten and spit on. He was hung on a tree and His blood was shed. He suffered under the eternal wrath of God to deliver you and me from our sins! And we? We have not resisted unto blood! We have not really been persecuted for Christ’s sake—not really! There are saints in our present world who indeed do resist unto blood. There are countries in our present world that hate the faith of God’s people. These saints are imprisoned and even slain for the sake of Christ. And here we are in our own country complaining about the smallest indignity that we must bear for Christ’s sake. We can become so caught up in the trivial and mundane matters of a Christian life.

But is this really what the Christian’s life is all about? Is

this what it is supposed to be? Where is our faith? Do not we have a cause and a kingdom that we represent today just as well as the saints of old? Do not we stand in faith together and go forth in Christ's service and strong in His might? We have not lost our focus, have we? Here we are today struggling, it seems, to keep our heads above water—with our family life, with our relationships with our children, with our relationships as husband and wife. Young people in the church view their parents as the enemy. Parents in the church do not want their children around. Husbands and wives cohabit the same house without carrying on any meaningful relationship with each other. It seems we are barely able to stay afloat. Where is our faith? Those saints risked their lives for their wives, husbands, children, and parents. They died for them that they might obtain a better resurrection! That is the faith I want! And I am sure that that is the faith you want too! How the examples before us humble us in our own weakness and pride.

But these same examples of faith ought to encourage us too. These people were not extraordinary—different from you and me. They were God's people who were called by God to live through hard times. We are God's people who are called to live in prosperity, where the

world ignores the church. But these times will not last. But this is the time and place in history in which God has chosen to place us. And the battle of faith, though different, must still be waged. We still remain unified around the cause of Christ's kingdom. We still together have the same hope of our eternal inheritance. Our calling is no different from that of these saints therefore: stand! We as a church must make a stand. And we as individual believers must stand in faithfulness as well. Then, let us stand in faith—just as these saints did.

Let us walk in faith, opposing the sins of the unbelieving world that surrounds us. God's saints must be willing to lay down their lives for Christ's sake and for the sake of one another. When we do, when strife and affliction come our way, and they will, we will exhibit the same quiet, brave endurance that these saints in Hebrews 11 showed. We have spoken only about the endurance of faith. But this *endurance* comes only because of the *character* of faith itself. If we do not understand the character of faith, then we will not truly learn to be as these saints. So, next broadcast, the Lord willing, we will continue our treatment of this Word of God here in Hebrews 11. May God preserve us, so that the lives we lead might be a witness to the generations to come.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

January 18, 2015
No. 3759

Faith: Strength to Endure (2)
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear radio friends,

Introduction

In our last broadcast we examined the endurance of the cloud of witnesses given us in Hebrews 11:32-39. Let me read those verses again today.

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephtha; 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. 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 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 caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.

The examples of these verses endured great afflictions because they believed in God and they in hope looked for the fulfillment of the promise of God's covenant, that is, the birth of a Savior who would deliver them from sin. These people were not great heroes with a naturally brave demeanor. They were not extraordinary people far greater in faith than you or I could ever be. These men, women, and children were common, ordinary people like you and me. No different. We pointed that out in our last broadcast.

For that reason, the example they leave for us to follow both admonishes us and encourages us. We are admonished because so often our own sights are so set on the earthly that we forget about seeking the heavenly. We forget that we fight a battle of faith. The faith that characterized the saints of old