Heb. 11:32-38; Judges 2:11-19; By Faith, the Judges Overcome I. Gideon II. Barak III. Samson IV. Jephthah

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you think that past sins disqualify a person from future service? Does the weakness that we all have become an excuse to sit on the sidelines? The fact is, the Bible very clearly reveals the weakness of men. God often uses the weak and humble people to perform His greatest works. Paul was a persecutor who rounded up God’s people. Peter denied Jesus 3 times. Today we apply this principle to the Judges. Each judge is going to be called to perform great acts of faith in the context of their own weakness. So the next group of people that Heb. 11 brings before us are the judges as we find in the book of Judges. As you may know, the book of Judges as a whole gives us an unflattering view of God’s people. There was no king, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Added to this, the cycle of the judges is clear. The Israelites rebel against God, God sends some foreign oppressor that inflicts hardship on the Israelites. The Israelites groan under this heavy burden, and God in His mercy sends a judge to deliver them. The Israelites obey for a time, only to fall into sinful rebellion once again. This cycle repeats itself again and again- but as each cycle repeats the Israelites descend deeper into their sin. Things get worse over time- not better. But today we find 4 bright spots- glimpses of light in the book of Judges. Now the judges were called to be deliverers- they would be clothed with the Holy Spirit to save God’s people. This week we will find that God calls these men to active duty and they respond by faith. Yes, they are at times fearful. And yes, their weakness is put on full display. But the weakness of man cannot undo the purposes of God. So today we consider this theme: by faith, the judges became overcomers as God uses the weak to deliver His people. One of the key applications for our passage today is this- that we might be encouraged! We all have times of weakness and fear- and yet God is pleased to use people like us to bring about His good will as we follow and act by faith!

**I. Gideon**

As we start, we are going to be considering these 4 judges in the order that we find them in Heb. 11:32. As 11:34 will apply- by faith some were made strong out of weakness; by faith some become mighty in war. So with each of these men we will find weakness- but also how God made them strong as they overcame mighty armies by faith. In order to follow along, let’s turn to the book of Judges. Starting in Judges 6 we find the man Gideon. So what was this weakness that Gideon had? Well, Gideon was a very fearful and hesitant leader. The LORD called Gideon and spoke to him in 6:12- calling him a mighty man of valor. But Gideon does not feel like a mighty man- and his actions do not really show a lot of valor at this point. He asks for a sign in 6:17- and again in 6:36 he asks for 2 more signs. Make this fleece wet and the ground dry. And the next day- make this fleece dry and the ground wet. God promised to be with him- to give him victory- and yet he was afraid. His first act was to offer a sacrifice to God and to tear down the Baal and Asherah in 6:27- but because he was afraid, he did this act at night. His battle was not only against the invading army of the Midianites- but it started with a battle against his own people. But after this initial fear and hesitation- even hidden first action of faith- his faith grows and he becomes more bold! Gideon will become a mighty man of valor- used by God and acting upon his faith. The great act of faith is recorded in chapter 7- where Gideon engages in battle against the Midianites. His army is a few good men- 300 in total. And his weapons are those of righteousness- armed with only a trumpet and torch. At the appointed time, this little band shouts for the Lord and for Gideon. The invading army turns on themselves- putting themselves to death as they self-destruct. It was an act of faith to tell 32,000 men to return home. It was an act of faith to surround the enemy armed only with a trumpet and a torch. And God was pleased to use this man to bring a great victory! God used an unlikely and fearful man- who in his weakness hesitated and questioned- and yet the Spirit of God used him to perform this great victory! Being afraid is no reason to refrain from action! Gideon was not a mighty man of valor on his own! The Spirit of God both called and equipped him for this office! God shows His strength by using the weak ones of this world to humble the wise and powerful!

**II. Barak**

The second judge in our list is Barak as we find in Judges 4. Barak also was a weak and timid leader- he was prone to hide on the day of battle. This time, the enemy at hand is that of Jabin the king of Canaan. And specifically, the leader of his army is Sisera. Now Sisera, the commander, has his army in the land reinforced by 900 chariots of iron. He oppressed the Israelites cruelly for 20 years. Now there was a prophetess in the land named Deborah- and she summoned Barak to gather an army and attack Sisera and his chariots. But Barak is not too keen to go- as 4:8 puts it- I will not go! The only way I will go is if you go with you. Barak needs Deborah to hold his hand if you will. The promise of victory is not enough to defeat Barak’s fear. And because of this, the victory will still be his, but the credit will be given to the girls. Now gathering an army to go to war against Sisera was still an act of faith. Even though he hesitates and is fearful, he does eventually go out and obey. This was no small thing. Although Barak will have an army of Israelites 10,000 strong; Sisera has his own army in addition to 900 iron chariots. In this day, an iron chariot would be like a tank. So we have a battalion of tanks rolling up on a infantry. The battle would favor Sisera by an overwhelming margin. And yet, the battle belongs to the Lord! By faith, Barak is able to put foreign armies to flight! By faith, the weak are made strong! So here again- it is the LORD who is doing mighty things! Although Jael will drive the final nail into Sisera’s coffin as 4:21 puts it- and even though Deborah needs to hold Barak’s hand- the victory is still secured! Barak is listed here in the Halls of Faith as a man of faith who obeyed! God does not hold our past weaknesses against us- fear can be driven out by faith- the timid can be stirred by the Spirit to act and obey!

**III. Samson**

The third judge on our list is Samson. Now Samson is likely the most well-known judge- both for his mighty acts but also for his consistent weakness. What was the weakness of Samson? Well, it was women! Samson was a womanizer- one who like to socialize with Philistine woman. Even though God had called him as a Nazarene and raised him up in the faith; equipping him with the strength of the Spirit to fight the Philistines, Samson was not immune to the female foes. This is evident in that Samsom marries a Philistine woman in chapter 14, visits a Philistine prostitute in chapter 16 and is seduced by Delilah the Philistine later in chapter 16. So the female Philistine is Samsom’s kryptonite. But that did not stop the LORD from using Him! In fact, Samson was clothed with strength by the Spirit and he brought many great blows to the Philistines by Samson’s hand. Samson was given extraordinary strength in keeping with his calling. He was able to stop the mouth of a lion as Heb. 11 says- by ripping a lion apart- limb from limb. But even more than that, the LORD used Samsom to inflict heavy casualties upon the Philistine oppressors. So in Judges 14 it starts with Samsom striking down 30 men. Next in chapter 15 he destroys the Philistine’s fields by burning them down. Foxes with torches tied to their tails are his chosen instrument of vengeance. Still later, Samson will strike down 1000 Philistine men at the edge of donkey’s jawbone. Still later on, Samson will escape his nemesis by ripping out the gates of city and breaking free from the bonds of those who would seek to restrain him. And finally, after being deceived by Deliliah and blinded in his folly, Samson will strike a major blow by pushing over the pillars of house of Dagon. After his capture and final humbling, Samson will pray for strength one more time and in his final sacrifice he will take some 3000 enemies to the grave. It would take his being blinded by his enemies for Samson to finally see that the source of his strength is the LORD his God. So Samson lived- and finally died by faith! Only when Samson became weak did he finally become strong! No longer trusting in his own strength or cunning- he learned that his only hope for victory comes from the LORD. By faith, although Samsom was weak, he became strong and overcame his foes!

**IV. Jephthah**

And finally, we come to the fourth judge- Jephthah. Now the life of Jephtha starts in Judges 11- and it begin with great weakness. Even shame! Samsom ended his life in humility- but Jephthah started his life despised and hated. You see, Jephthah was the child of a prostitute. His stepbrothers would never accept him- so he was cast out and driven from his father’s house. And as he began at a dishonorable birth, in Judges 11:3 says that he surrounded himself with worthless fellows. Bad company corrupts good morals. But from this lowly state, Jephthah was called to a glorious position. You see, he was a mighty man. He was a great warrior, and the Israelites needed a warrior. So in 11:8, the elders of Gilead came to Jephthah and asked him to be their leader. Be our head- they said- and fight against the Ammonites. Deliver us from the oppressive armies. The LORD stirred his heart and enabled him to lead. Even though his own brothers cast him out, Jephthah still believed in the LORD. So Jephthah speaks the words of the leader of Israel in 11:11- he vows to fight for Israel in the name of the LORD even as he calls on the Lord for help. He ascribes his victories to the LORD in v. 24- praising God for the victory Israel has received. Here again, God takes a man from a lowly state and uses him for an extraordinary purpose! Jephthah is a man of faith- he leads and saves the people of God from their enemies! He acknowledges that his calling and victory is from the LORD! As II Cor. 12:10 says, when we are weak then we are strong!

As you can see from this brief window in the lives of the judges of Israel, God is not limited by the power of man. He can do great things even though He uses weak and lowly means. The old saying is that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick- or He can hit the target with a crooked arrow! Well, these judges were very crooked! They had great weaknesses and sin- and they faced overwhelming odds! But if God is for us, who can be against us! God’s power is magnified by the weakness of men! God uses the humble and lowly to accomplish great things! And as we see these judges be used to save and deliver, we are reminded that salvation is of the Jews! Specifically, our Savior came in the package of a small child who was born in Bethlehem! Jesus Himself was born in a lowly state- despised and rejected by men. Yet from this humility came great strength! It was Jesus who defeated the army of darkness and crushed the head of the serpent! It is this Jesus who shut the mouth of the lion that would seek to devour! So these judges lived by faith- and died while trusting in the promises of God! And it is Jesus who is the author and perfector of this faith!

To conclude, the listing of these 4 judges in Heb. 11 is not just a recording of great men who did remarkable things. What sets these men apart is that they lived and died by faith! This is particularly clear when we consider the times in which these men lived. There was no king in the land and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Few and far between were the believers in this day- but a faithful remnant remained! And although plagued by great weakness, these men did live by faith! It was the LORD who called and equipped these men! The Spirit clothed them for action- and by faith they received the promise and were used by God to bring about the needed deliverance. By faith, the judges became overcomers as God uses the weak to deliver His people. Don’t let your weakness or humble state be an excuse for inactivity- never saying that God cannot use someone like me! Rather, be strong and courageous because in Christ and by the Spirit we too can be mighty warriors who battle against our enemies! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me- I can overcome sin and fear- I can obey my calling- and one day I too will have the complete victory!