

# SUPERHEROES OF FAITH – THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### God's Heroes are Humble

#### Hebrews 11:36-40

Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- <sup>38</sup> the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. <sup>40</sup> God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Throughout the past month, we looked at what it means to be a superhero of faith. We looked to great examples of faith in the some of the most well known characters of the Bible—Abel, Noah, Abraham and Moses. We saw that being a faith superhero begins with a pure heart, made clean by Jesus' blood. We saw that superheroes of faith stand up for God's truth even when it puts them at odds with a sin-filled world. We saw that superheroes of faith trust in God even when it seems impossible for his promises to come true. We saw that superheroes of faith have faith-filled priorities—realizing that the Lord and his love is truly their greatest treasure. We conclude our series this morning by looking at a very important attitude that exists in God's superheroes. It's one that does not come naturally. In fact, when it does exist in any one of us, it is truly a miracle of God's doing. That attitude is humility. God's heroes are humble.

For our faith inspiration this morning, we turn not to a specific character from the Scriptures, but rather to a nameless group of believers that we find at the end of the great heroes of faith chapter of the Bible—Hebrews 11. It makes sense when we talk about humility to talk about people whose names are not recorded. Who they were is not as important as the way they lived their lives. Theirs was a life of humility. God made sure of that. You know that humility is something that does not come naturally to any human being. Our sinful nature is inherently prideful. By nature, we humans think that we know a better way than God's way. We think we can follow our own path and everything will turn out alright. God has a way of teaching us humility.

We see that in our reading from Hebrews this morning. The heroes of faith that the author mentions were forced to undergo extreme acts of persecution. This must have been very humbling for these believers. Following the Lord did not lead them to the easy life... it was quite the opposite. It brought hardship and persecution, even to the point of death. Can we even begin to appreciate what these believers experienced when we hear about this persecution? *“Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains,*

*and in caves and holes in the ground.*” That doesn’t sound like a very fun life. That doesn’t sound like the kind of life that any person would choose for himself or herself. You can be certain, however, that such a life of intense opposition and persecution served God’s purpose of training these believers to rely completely on him and his grace.

This is one purpose that God can have for allowing suffering and hardship in our lives. As I said before, humility is not something that comes naturally. It is something that God has to work in us. One way he does that is by not always giving us what we want. Receiving hardship from the Lord’s hand serves the purpose of stamping out the pride in our hearts that tells us we deserve to get everything we want and to live a life of ease. It also serves the purpose of leading us to appreciate all the more the blessings we do have from God, realizing that we deserve nothing good from his hand. This recognition of our unworthiness is where true Christian humility begins.

In our gospel reading, we see a picture of humility in the tax collector who beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Unlike the Pharisee, this tax collector had a clear understanding of his own sinfulness and unworthiness to stand in the presence of a holy and righteous God. This understanding, worked by the Spirit, led to true humility on his part. Thank God when he convicts our hearts in a similar way. When we take the time to examine our own hearts and lives in view of the commands that God has given in his Word, we cannot come to any other conclusion than humbly saying, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” There’s a song that says, “It’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.” I guess the opposite is also true: it’s easy to be humble when you realize how imperfect you truly are. That is the value of a conscience convicted by the Holy Spirit, working in the Word. It brings about humility.

It doesn’t always work this way, however. There are those who defiantly say, “I don’t want a life of suffering. I don’t want to spend my time feeling sorry about my sin. That’s no fun. I want to live life my way. I’m going to enjoy my time on this earth and do whatever seems right to me.” The Bible has something to say about such a person: “*There is a way that seems right o man, but in the end it leads to death.*” In other words, you may defiantly turn away from a life of humility before the Lord, but in the end it will catch up with you. If you are not humbled by the Lord in this life, you will be humbled in the next. That is not something that any of us want for ourselves. It is far better for us to accept the Lord’s discipline and to walk humbly before him.

We do this remembering what Jesus told us at the end of our gospel reading, “*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*” Those who are humbled by the Lord will also be exalted. A life of humility is a good life. How can we say that? Look at what Jesus said about the tax collector who humbly confessed his sin to the Lord: he said that that man went home justified. What does it mean to be justified? It means forgiven. The tax collector humbly confessed his sin and the Lord graciously forgave him for the sake of his Son Jesus. True humility leads us to a great appreciation for God’s grace. We realize how we deserve nothing good from God and then we see how God gives us something wonderful by his grace—he gives us forgiveness.

Jesus earned our forgiveness by his own life of humility. If you want to know about what it means to live in humility, look no further than Jesus. Unlike us, Jesus had every reason to be filled with pride. He was perfect. He was completely without sin. He didn't deserve the horrible treatment he received. Yet he humbly submitted to his Father's will. He suffered and died an unjust death so that you and I might receive life. He was brought low so that we could be lifted up. What a tremendous blessing! To know this forgiveness is to experience an exalted life on this earth. That might not be the world's idea of the good life. But those of us who live in God's forgiveness every day realize what a great life it truly is.

And that is not the end of what it means to be exalted by God. God lifts us up in forgiveness day after day. But there is an ever greater exaltation that we all look forward to. This is the same exaltation that inspired the believers of old who we read about in our verses from Hebrews. It's mind-boggling to think of the suffering that they endured for the sake of the Lord. They humbly submitted to his will even when that included being sawed in two or put to death by the sword. They did this because they were looking forward to a heavenly reward. They did not reach perfection on earth. That isn't possible in a sinful world. But they knew that perfection awaited them beyond the grave. As we read in Hebrews: "*These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.*"<sup>40</sup> *God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*" They looked forward to and still anticipate the ultimate goal of their faith—the resurrection at the Last Day. That is exaltation beyond our wildest dreams.

Knowing the good things God gives us know out of his grace and knowing the good future he has in store for us in heaven we are inspired to persevere and humbly walk the way our heroes of faith walked in days gone by—knowing that one day we will walk with them on the streets of gold. **Amen.**

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