"Even If!" – Hebrews 11

Somebody tell us this morning about a time when God answered your prayer. Tell us about how He gave you what you asked for. He heard you crying and came to your rescue or He heard your prayer and answered it like you asked. Anybody?

Now…don't answer out loud but think about a time when God DID NOT answer your prayer. Remember that time when you asked God for help and you felt like you didn't get it? Maybe you asked for more money to pay your bills or you asked for more time with a loved one. Maybe you asked for a miracle, knowing He is still in the miracle business…but it felt like Heaven was silent. We have all been there.

You have faith that God can do it. You got right with God and asked forgiveness of all sin in your life. You prayed fervently and with power and faith, praying words of scripture back to Him, reminding Him of all the times He has done it in the past and how He promised to hear you and be with you and yet…nothing.

God, where are you? If you did this, God, I would give you all the glory. Why don't you answer? Nothing. How do you feel? What happened to your faith? **Oswald Chambers** was a great author of years ago and in his book, Run Today's Race, he wrote*, "Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace."*

That reference to a fiery furnace is obviously about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from **Daniel chapter 3**. Yes, our text this morning is from **Hebrews 11,** but I want to remind you of what those Hebrew boys said to the king so turn to the book of Daniel really quick. It's between Ezekiel and Hosea in the Old Testament. You remember the story. King Nebuchanezzar made a law that everybody had to worship some golden idol he had made and if they didn't, he said they would be killed by being thrown into a huge fiery furnace. And everybody in the kingdom did except for three young Hebrew boys. And, oh, that made the king mad.

Look at **Daniel 3:15-18**. The king says*, "Now when you hear the sound…if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"*

[16] Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. [17] If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. [18] But ***even if*** *he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

Ooh! That's good stuff right there! I love that. And then you know how it ends. They are chunked into the fire and Jesus shows up there with them (what's that called? A Christophany) and they aren't hurt. They don't even smell like smoke and the true God got all the glory. Man, I bet that was a sight to see.

Yet, when you ask for healing of your spouse's cancer or just enough money to pay the rent or even for enough gas in the tank to get to work and yet God doesn't answer and you wind up on the side of the road walking. Where is your faith then? Where is God then?

Let's turn now to the New Testament book of **Hebrews and to the 11th chapter**. What is **Hebrews 11** called? The faith chapter. I want to close out our study of the Old Testament saints and heroes by looking at a New Testament passage that talks about those same people. Many of the saints we have been studying for the past four months or so are mentioned here in this passage.

It talks about the faith of Moses and Noah and Abraham and gives a quick summary of the miracles God did in their lives. The writer mentions Isaac and Jacob and even the prostitute Rahab and how God honored their faith in amazing ways. Reading about these guys really builds one's faith and makes you believe that God is able to do amazingly more than we could ever ask or imagine. (Eph. 3:20)

Let's read **verses 32-35**. Don't go any further than that though. Just **32-35**. Let's read that. *"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. [35] Women received back their dead, raised to life again."* Stop right there!

Wow! Look at God get all the glory for what He did. That builds your faith and even if you aren't a Christian, that makes you say, *"Wow! I want some of that!"* Right? You have to love hearing about all those Old Testament heroes and their faith.

The problem is the passage doesn't stop there. The chapter continues and it changes tone after **verse 35**. Now, if the author had wanted people to become Christians he should have left this next part out. All those verses up to 35 make the Christian life and faith sound like it's all glory and good stuff. I want to conquer kingdoms and administer justice and be powerful in battle. I like that part. But I'm afraid I have to read the next passage as well. Join me as I read the second part of **verse 35** through the end of the chapter.

"There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. [36] Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. [37] They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— [38] the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. [39] These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, [40] since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

If you are not a Christian and were thinking about making that decision, boy, that might change your mind, huh? So, what about those people? What did they do wrong that the others did right? I mean, think about Peter in **Acts chapter 12**. He was released from prison by an angel in the middle of the night because the church was praying for him. But this is AFTER he denied Jesus three times! If anybody deserved to stay in prison it was Pete.

Or, how about Samson in **Judges 6**? This guy is a fascinating character but not a godly man at all. I don't think he ever prayed once in his life until the very end when he prayed to get revenge on his enemies. And God heard that prayer and answered it just like Samson asked.

So, why do they get their prayers answered and you don't? Or why do you sometimes get your prayers answered and other times you don't? What do you have to do to get your prayers answered by God? I mentioned before that we all know we need to pray fervently and pray in faith and with thankfulness and with expectation and we know we need to keep praying and keep praying. We all know we should pray that way and yet sometimes we get our prayers answered and sometimes we don't. So, what's the secret?

You want to know my answer? Do you want to know what I have learned in my life? Here's my answer. I don't know. I don't. But I have come to learn that **Hebrews 11** says that without faith it is impossible to please God. And I have come to learn that **Oswald**

Chambers was right with his quote. Let me read it to you again. *"Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love."* That is truth. That's what I know. God is love.

Did God not answer your prayer like you wanted? God is love. Did God answer the prayer of your heathen neighbor? God is love. Is God silent when you pray? Does He do the opposite of what you asked? Did He not give you what you thought you needed and you promised to give Him glory if He did? I don't understand it. It hurts. It's painful. It doesn't make sense to me either but even when God doesn't make sense to me and my little pea brain, I know God is love. I know because scripture says it but I also know it because I have seen it. I have lived it.

Listen. God never promises to answer all your prayers even if you pray them like scripture says to pray. He never promises to give you everything you want or even all the things you might think you really need. He doesn't. What He promises is that He loves you and He will be with you ***even if*** you go through the fiery furnace; even if you face torture, jeers, flogging, chains and imprisonment like it says in our passage. Even if you have cancer, He will be with you. Even if your spouse leaves you, He will be with you. Even if your whole family turns their back on you, God promises to be with you. He will be with you in that fiery furnace of doubt and shame and grief and uncertainty. He will be with you when nobody else is.

We sing a **Matthew West** song around here pretty often and I love the words to it. It's called the God Who Stays and the words to the chorus are, "You're the God who stays
You're the one who runs in my direction
When the whole world walks away
You're the God who stands
With wide open arms
And You tell me nothing I have ever done can separate my heart
From the God who stays

God doesn't promise to answer every prayer but He promises to be with you even if you go through trials.

Some of you know my niece, Blair. When she was a little girl she was going through some difficulty in her life and she was raised to pray about everything and so she did. She prayed and prayed the best a little girl knew how but whatever it was she was going through continued and God did not answer her prayer. She said, *"Mama, I don't understand. I have*

prayed and prayed like you taught me to." Then she said, ***"I'm cute and I'm faithful. Why doesn't God answer my prayer?"*** She was cute and faithful then and she's still cute and faithful but God never mentioned cute or faithful being a guarantee to get Him to answer a prayer. But He does promise to be with us even if we go through those difficulties.

But, I hear ya. Todd, what's that mean that God will be with us? We know He was with Shadrach and the boys in the fire. But what does it look like for us today? Well, I'll tell you what it looks like in my life. It looks like, ***"His presence is enough."***

In July of 2020, my Mama fell and hit her head. When I got the call that she was in the hospital, I immediately headed that way. And you know the kind of prayer I was praying in my truck speeding along, right? She was elderly but I knew she had lots more good years; years of teaching and living out God's will and word and I prayed fervently like it says to. But God didn't answer that prayer. Many of you have been in that same situation.

At her funeral, some beautiful songs were sung and some nice words were said and as I sat there on the front row, I was about to have a panic attack. The whole family was there. Every friend and church member was there and I was supposed to sum up my Mama's life in 2,000 words. I said, "Lord, I can't do this." And He said, "I know but my presence is enough." And He just kept telling me. "My presence is enough. My presence is enough. My presence is enough." Until I started saying it back to Him. "Your presence is enough. Your presence is enough. Your presence is enough."

And when it came time, God stood me up there like I was an ugly Ken doll and said through me what He wanted me to say. Not because I am anything special or because I prayed in some special way but so I could stand up here six years later and tell you with confidence that HIS PRESENCE IS ENOUGH! His presence is enough EVEN IF, even when, although you go through a fiery trial that you can't get through alone. And if you need more of His presence, get closer to Him.

Music

If you need more of His grace, more of His comfort, more of His wisdom get closer to Him. You don't have to ask Him to get closer to you. It wasn't Him that moved. He's right there. Get closer to Him. Do it right now. Let's bow our heads.

If you don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus, then you do not have His presence in your life. In fact, scripture says you are His enemy. That's the worst place to be. But all you have to do is believe that God the Father sent His Son Jesus to die on the

cross to pay for your sins – all the times you have displeased Him. Jesus took all your sin and died to be the perfect sacrifice so you don't have to spend eternity in Hell. Then that belief will change your life and you will have His presence with you and you will start to change and be more like Him every day. Do that right now as the music plays.

Prayer

I want you to see one last thing before we go. Turn to Habakkuk chapter 3. It's hard to find so I'll give you a minute. Use your table of contents. No shame in that for Habakkuk. I want you to see this and mark it in your Bibles. Habakkuk chapter 3, verses 17-18 says,

"Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior."

This little plaque of wood sits on my shelf in my study. It says, "Praise the Lord anyway." It was made by my dad and given to my mom in 1977.

Even if there is no food in the fridge, praise the Lord anyway.

Even if there is no money in the bank, praise the Lord anyway.

Even if there is no hope for my loved one, praise the Lord anyway.

Even if there is no freedom for inmate, praise the Lord anyway.

Even if there is no other reason, God is good so I will praise the Lord anyway.