

Cloud of witnesses

Theology | 20/10/2012 @ 15:26

1. Descriptions of three examples of the “others” referred to in Hebrews 11:36. (You should describe the situations of three different people.)

The idea of torturing clearly implied in verse 11:36 leads our imagination into times of the early church, which were utmost stormy for its very existence. Engaging higher perspective, however, shows us, that not only notoriously known New Testament martyrs like st. Stephen or st. Paul are worthy to enter those celestial hall of fame, those “cloud of witnesses” from verse 12:1, whose existence is revealed here to encourage us into following an example of faith heroes, who turned their sight aside from bodily conditions, groaning for invisible deliverance from this worldly estate.

It could be even said, that in every state, in every moment of God's people history, two world views were in intense contradiction: The prevailing one, which held worldly power with godless self-confidence, that whatever God's kingdom, paradise or perfect society is, it could be set up in mortal conditions. Then there was the other voice, which could never compete in its strength with the first one, but which nonetheless surpassed it by its penetrating urgency, because of bearing the truth about the kingdom of God, which is in heaven and in heaven only, unreachable for a fallen man but by faith in the God Almighty, “who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do” (Ro 4:17).

Stephen

Although he was very young and his days as the servant of God weren't many in time of his martyrdom, his persona is surrounded by glimmering aura of apostolic church enthusiasm and power. Moreover is there obvious evidence of sharp understanding of the gospel in record of his speech right before his death by stoning. His face, which resemble shiny angelic glory, his fullness of the Holy Spirit and his decisive and fearless speech makes him exemplary witness of Jesus Christ, which is confirmed by his last words:

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.”
(Acts 7:55–56)

Isaiah

The mention of sawing in Heb. 11:37 leads us with quite a little uncertainty into accepting rabbinic rumor of Isaiah's death in Bethlehem. His lifelong prophetic service brought its fruit. For example by encouraging king Hezekiah into a fortunate decision of faith, which was to resist Assyrian king with his immense army.

His task was, however, far beyond speaking into political matters with the word from God. Many of his visions are christocentric and after intertextual comparison of Paul's letter to the Romans it can be assumed, that Isaiah was Pauls spiritual ancestor, explaining visions of soteriological breakthroughs, that Paul experienced on his own.

Apostle Paul

Those notoriously known New Testament figure of apostle Paul could indeed serve as the very appropriate example of that kind of voice. Personality of this pharisee from Damascus could be described as that he lived all his life in acute passion for God. The only mentionable excursion in such a simple summary of his life is that somewhere in the middle of his life Christ Jesus revealed to him, which led him into deep review of his personal religious confession from the very dogmatic one into a confession, where the only dogma is God's love descending from His holiness upon whole humanity in the person of Jesus Christ and calling every single man to requite this love back.

His wanderings weren't just spiritual, but also real, physical. Arndt for the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul didn't waste any time with anything else than telling his people, that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of every single brick of Jewish religious system. Nor he wasted any time with anything else than telling gentiles, that Jesus came to set mankind free from the captivity of sin.

On his four missionary journeys Paul exhibited extraordinary persistence. I use to be caught in reverence, while reading his count of sufferings he underwent:

Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

(2. Cor. 11:24–27, RSV)

Paul was possibly executed in Rome. His head was cut of.

2. A comparison and contrast of the two types of faith discussed in Hebrews 11—the overcomers and the others.

There are no two types of faith, for the only faith has power: The faith that is put in Christ Jesus. There are, however, two main challenges of faith discussed in Heb. 11.

A. Faith of those “who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, ...”(v. 33).

B. Faith of those “who were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life”. (v. 35)

3. An explanation of how Habakkuk 2:4, “But the righteous will live by his faith,” applies to both the overcomers and the others.

Basically, the faith is kind of medium of life both for those, who overcame the world by the power of God, which descended in response to his faith as well as for the other, who may have been overcame himself in time of his earthly existence, but who shall never be overcame by the very death of his Spirit in eternal separation from God as the source of every life. There are two different, complementary treatments of verse Hab. 2:4 in New Testament, both of them are reassuring us about its relation to every man of faith:

A. In Romans 1:17 apostle Paul uses this verse in order to emphasize divine soteriological decree of salvation by faith.

Paul puts stress rather on momentary salvation, which occurs right at the moment of christian confession.

B. Hebrews 10:38 offers complementing view by emphasizing constant, life-long walking in faith.

... but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.

Here an application arises for both our examples: Overcomer shall know, that its his walking in complete deliverance, that brought him such an overwhelming grace. The overcomer shall know, that force, that is able to separate believer from the love of God, is just not.

4. Discussion of how the experiences of the people in Hebrews 11 relate to contemporary Christianity in your own culture. Your discussion should include responses to the following questions:

a) How can your church congregation apply this passage?

My church should grab both obvious messages, which are delivered to us in this magnificent chapter:

1. There is nothing unachievable, nothing impossible for those, who follows will of God. Gods voice and His power should be expected on daily basis.
2. Witness of our faith is nothing that we could feel ashamed. Our testimonies needs to be proud and convinced, for we are delivering the most powerful and enjoyable news ever.

b) How does this passage apply to you in your personal walk with the Lord?

See section a), pt. 1.

c) In what ways does this passage relate to sharing the gospel with the lost in the community where you live?

See section a), pt. 2.

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