

Public Faith

Hebrews 11:17-31; 12:1-3
Faces of Faith: Part 2

Introduction

At one point in the story of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian meets and begins to walk with a fellow-traveler name Faithful. They come to a town named Vanity because *all that is sold, or that comes there is vanity*. All year long this town holds a fair called Vanity-fair. Christian and Faithful stick out like sore thumbs as they want nothing to do with anything that's being sold. The townsfolk hate them, as their very presence stirs up quite a hubbub. This draws the attention of the lord of the town, Beelzebub, who has them arrested. They are caged, mocked, abused, and imprisoned before Faithful is brutally executed. Christian is put back into prison until *He who overrules all things* arranges his escape, just as He did for Peter in **Acts 12**. This shows us what it means for a Christian to have public faith.

The Price of Public Faith

There were some in the town who, when Christian and Faithful were being treated so bad, tried to stand up for them and ease their suffering. But the rest of the crowd saw this as siding with the pilgrims and they attacked the good folks for that. Even the appearance of faithfulness is not welcomed by the world.

Private Faith, Is It an Option?

The truth is the world doesn't mind us having faith in God if we keep it to ourselves. We're welcome to believe whatever we want to believe if we don't let it affect our public life. We can go to church, just keep the Gospel within these four walls. But is private faith valid, or can we even call it faith? What we believe determines how we live. That's why James says that faith *without works is dead* (**James 2:26**).

Safety Is not an Option

As we saw in the introduction, public faith has its consequences. Christian was imprisoned and beaten; Faithful was killed. Translator of the Latin **Vulgate**, Jerome said: *God has entered us as contestants in a racecourse where it is our lot to be always striving. This place, this valley of tears, is not a condition of peace, not a state of security, but an arena of struggle and endurance*. Jesus said in our Gospel lesson today: *"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division"* (**Luke 12:51**). These are good words to remember when we're tempted to "lay low" and not make waves because of our faith in God. Faith is not about peace, security, or safety; it's about striving.

Examples of Public Faith

The apostle gives us six examples of individuals with public faith: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab. I want to draw your attention to Moses and Rahab.

The Public Faith of Moses

Moses *[chose] rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25)*. Raised in the Pharaoh's palace, he gave up the life of luxury he was used to when he found he was a Hebrew. He left Egypt and traded his prince's scepter for a shepherd's staff. For forty years, he tended sheep until God called Him from a burning bush and he went back to Egypt in faith to lead God's people out to freedom. Talk about a life-changing faith! Moses went from prince to pauper to prophet.

The Public Faith of Rahab

Rahab told the Israelite spies: *"I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you" (Joshua 2:9)*. Her faith caused her to hide the spies and ask for her life and the life of her family when they conquered Jericho. Not only was her life spared, but she became the great-great-grandmother of King David and is mentioned in the book of **Matthew** in the lineage of Jesus.

Do Not Grow Weary

But how can we be brave enough or strong enough to express our faith publicly when the cost may be our life? The apostle goes on to say: *Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted (Hebrews 12:3)*. Jesus endured suffering so we can have the strength and courage to do so, too. How is this possible? Not only is He our Example, He died and rose again so we can have our sins forgiven and feast on His body and blood. Through His Word and Sacrament, He gives us **PUBLIC FAITH** and strengthens us so we can *run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2)*.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
