Heb. 11: 32-38; I Kings 17:17-24; By Faith, the Dead are Raised I. The Challenge to this Faith II. The Reward for this Faith III. The End for Which we Hope

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are reading a book, what do you hope to find? Specifically, when you are coming close to the end of the book, most people are looking for a good resolution. We expect the bad guys to be caught and the good guys to win. But unfortunately, this does not always happen in the world today. Sometimes it happens that the wicked flourish while the righteous are persecuted. Not everything is as it should be. Today, as we return to Heb. 11; we find the issue of the resurrection. As Heb. 11:35 says- by faith, women received back their dead by resurrection. The issue of the resurrection brings our faith close to home. The issue of death has touched many of us here. The fact is, none of the members of our church has ever stood up to a giant in a battle. None of us have been cast into a fiery furnace and none of us have been thrown into a lion den. But when it comes to death- many of our members have faced the death of a loved on. Some have even experienced the death of a child. So in many ways, this issue strikes close to home. How does faith help us when we are standing at the graveside? How does faith strengthen us when we experience the sting of death? So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ promises to give a better life to those who die in faith.

**I. The Challenge to this Faith**

In our first point we consider the challenge that death proposes to our faith. Death is the last enemy, and death is so final. Death is the cold dew that falls on our brow. Death is the pale kiss that closes our eyes forever. Sometimes death is slow in coming as we waste away- and other times death is sudden and unexpected. It has often been said that death comes for us all. The young can die, the old must die- but we all will die. This is nothing new for us- we know that two things are certain in life- death and taxes. But how does faith help us when we come to face to face with death- with our own death or the death of others? Heb. 11:35 is our text- by faith women received their dead. Note here that v. 35 gives us plural examples- there were multiple women who had their loved ones die. There are 3 clear examples found in the Bible- the widow of Zarephath in I Kings 17 which we read. The Shunammite woman in II Kings 4. And we read of Mary and Martha in John 11. So 3 examples of women where these had their loved ones taken away in death. But let’s focus on the first one- the widow of Zarephath in I Kings 17. The faith of this widow was clear in her acceptance and obedience. She was met in the field by Elijah and given a commandment from the LORD. Go and make me a cake of bread for me first- even though you have almost nothing left and you are living in the middle of a drought- go and make me some food. Put your own well-being- and the life of your own son on the back burner for a time. First obey the word of the LORD. Do not doubt- only believe and obey! And remember that Zarephath was in the area of Sidon- in other words this is not an Israelite but a Gentile. Even though you live among foreign people who serve pagan gods- I want you to listen to the God of Israel and obey His voice. And she does the very thing that she is asked! She obeys the word of Elijah and the voice of LORD God is heard, listened to, believed and obeyed! She acted in faith- using up the little bit of flour and oil that was left- believing the promise of God that He would provide for her until the drought was over and the rain came. She put obedience before her own welfare and even before her own son. But as time went on, her own son became sick and died. I Kings 17:17- there was no breath in him. This struck the heart of this woman and became a severe challenge to her faith. She interpreted this event as a reminder of her sin. So she says in v. 18- did the LORD kill my son because of my sin? Did you come here Elijah to put my sin on display and take the life of my son? Had the LORD repaid the kindness of this widow with ill? I think that this widow’s response to the death of her son is completely understandable. How often don’t God’s people interpret hardship as an attack. Did God send this trial because of something I have done? Is God repaying me because of my sin? We understand that God does send suffering upon the wicked as a foretaste of eternal damnation- but what about the suffering of God’s people? Why is God doing this to me? What have I done to deserve this? Is God against me- is He angry with me- is He punishing me when my loved one dies? This is the ache of a heart that has seen a loved one brought to death too soon! But as Jesus will later say in John 11 to his disciples, this illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it! So although their loved ones died, by faith their loved ones will be raised! By faith, women received back their dead by resurrection!

**II. The Reward for this Faith**

The reward for faith that was given to these women is clear- their dead loved ones were raised. So in I Kings 17, Elijah will stretch out over this boy 3 times and his life will come back. In II Kings 4, Elisha will stretch out over this young boy, and the Shunammite’s son will sneeze 7 times and then open his eyes! In John 11, Jesus will call out for Lazarus to come out- and Mary and Marthy will receive their dead brother back from the grave after he had been dead for 4 days. So the reward for the faith of these women is specific, clear and shared. They all received back their dead by resurrection. Now the concept of the resurrection of the dead is not a new concept in the NT. As we saw a few weeks ago, even Job longed for the day when his corrupted flesh would be raised to stand on the earth to see the redeemer. Interestingly, there are 6 recorded resurrections in the Bible before the resurrection of Jesus. 3 in the OT- including the 2 we already talked about and the man who was thrown on Elisha’s bones in II Kings 13. The hope of the resurrection is something that the people of God have always longed for- death is an enemy that must be defeated. The grave is a prison that must be escaped from. God brings life! Even God reveals this truth about Himself- He is the God of the Living! And Jesus said about himself that He is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Him, thou he die, he shall live. And everyone who lives and believes in Him shall never die! That is exactly what Jesus said in John 11- and when asked if they believed this- Mary and Martha affirmed by saying that they believed the He, Jesus, was the Christ! So then, do you believe this about Jesus? Do you believe what He said about himself? That He is the resurrection and life- and that He gives resurrection life to those who believe in Him? Do we also believe that those who believe in Jesus shall never die? Well- before you answer that- remember what happened to these 3 individuals who died! What happened to the son of widow in I Kings 17- what happened to the son of the Shunammite- what happened to Lazarus? By faith- all three of these sons were raised. However, all three of them died again! Don’t forget this point- all three died, were raised, and died again! When we think about it- all three of these sons died twice! So where is the good news here? What hope do we have today? We too are called to live by faith! These women believed in Jesus- they were women of faith! Why did their loved ones still have to die? Are we little more than dead men walking? Was their faith too weak- is their Savior too weak to save to the uttermost? How about us- did our loved ones die because we did not have strong enough faith? Or even worse- did our loves ones die because Jesus was not and is not able to save them? As Paul would say in I Cor. 15- if the dead are not raised, your faith is futile and your are still in your sins! Those who have died- even though they died in the faith- have perished! If there is no lasting resurrection, do we really have good news? Paul put the choice this way. To live is Christ, to die is gain. There is something better that is coming! Life in this world is a blessing and a gift- but nothing compared to the glory to come. Would we pick a Timex over a Rolex- or choose a dry cracker over a steak dinner for a meal? If this life is all that there is- we are to be pitied! But there is something better that is coming- and that gift of life is lasting!

**III. The End for Which we Hope**

Praise God- Jesus has been raised- and through Jesus comes also the resurrection of the death! The life we live today is in many ways a shadow. The joys are muted- our senses dull- even the life we have is not what it will be one day! So we come to our last point- the end for which we hope! Look back at our text from Heb. 11:35. This verse ends by saying- by faith they died- so that they might rise again to a better life! Death is portal though which we enter life! These all died in the hope that they might be raised to a better life! To be sure, it would be wonderful to have our loved ones back from the grave. But upon further reflection, is that what we really want? Is that what we would want for them- to be brought back to earth to take on this flesh in its current form? Is there not something better- greater for which we long? Some greater life- a better life that we desire for them and for us? Yes, to be sure, there is life to be found today. There is life in this body- experienced in this mortal flesh. These 3 illustrations of resurrection are proof that the God in whom we trust is able to give life to our bodies. But what then is the ultimate end for which we hope? True faith hopes for- longs for- expects to be raised again to a better life! As you know, there are two kinds of resurrection indicated in our passage. One kind that these women received- which was a blessing for them. But there is another kind of resurrection- one that we read of in I Cor. 15. Read I Cor. 15:50-57. So one kind of resurrection is temporary and passing- providing momentary joy which these women experienced. Another kind of resurrection is perfect, lasting and provides eternal joy! If our loved ones died in faith- by faith they will be raised again! By faith we know that those who die in the Lord will be raised again unto eternal life! Raised immortal and perfect- like Christ our glorious head! It is this kind of resurrection that we look forward to- by faith! So although we do miss our loved ones, we know that they died in the hope of being raised to a better life! By faith we want a better resurrection for them and for us- by faith we look forward to the time when we might rise against to a better life!

To conclude, death is unavoidable in this life. But there is a certainty more certain than death- that Jesus has been raised and that He will raise His people on that last day! The resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting is the end for which we hope- something that we look forward to by faith! As our theme states: Jesus Christ promises to give a better life to those who die in faith. How does faith help you- how are you steeled by your faith when you face death? Either your own death or the death of a loved one? The only thing that will get you through this is faith in Jesus who is the resurrection and the life- for He has promised a better life to those who live by faith!