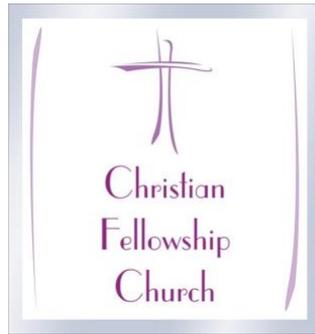


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Ministry of the Word

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by Vincent Gannon &

Scripture: Hebrews 11:32-34

Subject: Part 38 - The Exploits of Faith

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to fight the armies of the aliens.

God works through faith, and by faith alone. Faith is the only way to God, to please God and to attain his blessing. It's not about feelings or sentiment that we somehow can conger up ourselves through sheer will power; but Faith is confidence in God, in God's Word, and in His Promises. Faith is a gift from God. It is sometimes tested. It sometimes seems foolish, but it conquers in the end. This chapter so far has presented to us powerful examples of people who lived their lives by faith. In spite of their own faults and failings, ups and downs, regardless of the obstacles, temptations, tests, trials, culture, difficulties, personal feelings, circumstances and situations, in the end, they found a way forward to walk in faith. They dared to believe God, trust God and on account of that, they were used by God in some amazing ways. They faithfully accepted responsibility, sometimes reluctantly and sometimes imperfectly, but in spite of all that, they believed God. They answered the call of God, they followed obediently and with great courage, walked by faith, and their great faith was rewarded. In the examples we have seen, and even in our own lives we know it to be true, that some of faith's victories are private, some are public, sometimes they seem ordinary

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while other times they are extraordinary, miraculous. Some were delivered by faith, while others were given grace, sufficient grace, to bear the hardships.

We have noted there are only two kinds of people in this world. Those who have hope and those without hope. The hope of the believer is rooted and grounded in Faith. In this chapter, the people of faith are connect to the actions of faith. As we continue we will see that faith is tested. As with these servants of God, their faith was tested and tried and eventually it was found true, they were victorious. *But what is victory? How does the world define it? How does the bible define it?* The world defines it as an act of defeating an enemy or opponent in a battle, game, or other competition. It's about success as the world sees success, achievement, conquest, the win. Biblical victory however is different. Biblical victory is about being faithful, living by the word of God in a fallen and broken world. When we look down at chapter 11 verses 32 to 40, we see the victory of faith. In verses 32 to 34 we see it in situations of triumph and verses 35 to 40 we see it in situations of tragedy. But in all situations and circumstances, God is victorious. This morning we are just going to concentrate on verses 32 to 34, the exploits of faith in triumphant situations. The intensity of the chapter is ramped up once again and as we see the following -

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: Hebrews 11:32.

The writer begins by declaring, that he didn't have enough of time to go through every example of people in the old testament that lived by faith. It's not that he ran out of examples regarding the triumphs of faith, there are just too many. The men here in these verses had their faith tested in life and death situations, severe threat. It was life and death faith. These 6 men were leaders, 4 Judges, a King and a prophet. They accepted the responsibility that God gave them, they trusted and depended upon God. Against the odds, they all had victory and overcame the obstacles. What's interesting is, in the shadow of their lives, there were 6 women. Gideon, had a concubine, and their son rebelled against him; Barak had the help of Deborah the prophetess, who encourage him, Samson fell for Delilah, who enslaved him; Jephthah had a daughter who taught him about love, sacrifice and devotion; David had a few women, but one in particular was Bathsheba, and he ran into sin after her; then Samuel, whose mother's devotional prayers for his life, gave him back to God.

The first four men's stories are all found in the book of Judges, right after the Book of Joshua. After Joshua had died, the children's of Israel hearts turned away from God. They forsook God and worshipped foreign gods. It was a terrible dark time in their history, in fact in Judges 21 verse 25 it says:

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Nevertheless, God raised up judges to deliver them out of the hands of those who plundered them because He listened to the peoples cries and He was moved to pity by their groanings. In verse 18 of Chapter 2, it says that when the Lord raised up judges, He was with the judges. The judges where not actual judges as we know today, but they were people who were elevated to a place of leadership, were their courage, leadership and their wisdom was required. These accounts are not in chronological order, but we will take them in order as given here in these verses.

The first one is - **Gideon**.

The account of Gideon begins in Judges chapter 6. At that time, the Lord had delivered the children of Israel into the hands of the Midianites for seven years as they did evil in the sight of the Lord. Also, the Amalekites and others from the East were coming against them. These were dark days, a time of sever trouble brought on by their rejection of God. None the less, God had not abandon them. Part of the promises had yet to be fulfilled. God still had a purpose and plan as He still does today. In the midst of all this, the Angel of the Lord, which was actually a theophany of Jesus, went to Gideon and said to him "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour!" Wow, sounds promising doesn't it... But Gideon didn't feel like that, in fact he felt completely unqualified, inadequate, unsure, even unworthy, yet God called him into leadership. God had to assure Gideon. 1st time Gideon wanted to make sure that it was God who was speaking to him, and God made fire come out of the rock, consuming the meat and the unleavened bread. The second and third sign involved the fleece which he asked God to send as confirmation. Gideon knew of God's power and abilities. He was faced with being an instrument of God to accomplish God's will. There was no small hesitancy to do it, just needed reassurance. God gave him supernatural assurances, one after the other, he needed to be empowered with the strength of the Holy Spirit. When the Midianites were on their annual pillage and plunder of Israel, the Midianites and Amalekites, and the other people of

the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.

Gideon had 32,000 men. The odds were against them; but God had a different plan. God told Gideon that most of his army would have to go. So the first 22,000 to go were those who were afraid, who weren't comfortable with the situation. *When push would come to shove would they have been that committed, would they have stood their ground?* Kind of like people who turn up to church now and again, whenever its easy and comfortable, but when faith is tested, they are no longer around. But there was still too many, God wanted the glory for Himself. The account is in chapter 7, where God gave the last 10,000 another test which left 300. God set it up that Gideon and the 300 men divided into 3 companies, giving each man a trumpet, an empty pitcher, and torches inside the pitcher. When the sign was given, they had to blow the trumpet, shout '*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon*' and then break the pitchers and hold the torches. Not the kind of weapons you think would win a war, but God was in control and the enemy got confused, and ended up killing themselves. God won the battle! Real faith is tested and Gideon's greatness lay in a great God who gave him great faith, to be a great leader, so that he was a great encouragement to his troops in the mist of great odds. He may not have started out too well but it is the finish that matters. The next person we see is Barak, which means lighting. The account is found in chapter 4 of Judges.

Barak

If you stop to consider as you read Judges chapter 4, it seems that it is more about Deborah than Barak. So how did he get into chapter 11 of Hebrews? The people of Israel were not just military weak, they were also spiritually weak. The storms of judgment once more began to roll from heaven. The Amorites had been oppressing the people. Deborah was a Prophetess who was called to be one of the Judges. The people were crying out for help and she sent for Barak. She told Barak to take 10,000 men to Mount Tabor and fight Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitudes at the River Kishon; and God would deliver them into his hand. Barak hesitated and felt incapable, inadequate to deal with the enormity of the task and insisted Deborah to go with him. She told him that if she went, he would have no glory and Sisera would fall into the hands of a woman. Barak surrendered to the call of God on his life. He was awakened to the fact that God was really in this and was going

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to give them the victory so he went out in faith but brought Deborah with him. Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who *were* with him. Those iron chariots would have been like tanks. Remember Psalm 20 verse 7 - *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.*

Barak believed God and conquered with 10,000. He didn't win because militarily speaking they were better. Even though he invited Deborah there, he was willing to engage in the call and engage in the battle, while putting his trust in God, whom he believed would see him through. Sisera ended up getting away from the battle, where he fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of a Kenite. He went into her tent where he was thirsty and exhausted from the battle. She covered him with a blanket, and gave him milk. He lay down and fell asleep thinking that Jael was guarding the door and telling them no-one was in there, and as he slept, she took a tent peg and hammer and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground. So by the time Barak got to the tent, Jael showed him dead Sisera. Just like Deborah had said.

Then next is **Samson**.

Samson is a very well-known individual whose account is found in Judges chapters 13 to 16. After 40 years of oppression this man was raised up by God. The Children of Israel at this point were being oppressed by the Philistines. Samson was raised up as a judge to deliver the people of Israel from the Philistines. He was a man of valour, of courage and of great strength. Strength was his gift from God. He killed a young lion, he killed 30 men at a time, even a thousand men with a fresh donkey jawbone by himself. Once he tied the tails of 300 foxes which he caught himself, and put a torch between each pair of tails, then let them go to burn down the Philistines grains, vineyards and olive groves. Samson brought terror to the doors of the Philistines. Even in his death when he was blind, and the secret of his strength had been taken away from him, he was brought out into the temple of Dagon as a prisoner of the Philistines, where 3,000 were sitting on the roof watching and mocking him. He prayed to God to give him strength once more, with that and with one blow, he took vengeance on the Philistines. With all his might, he took hold of the two middle supporting pillars and pushed them, so that the temple fell and everyone who were in it died. He kill more Philistines in his death then he had killed in his life.

He was man that learned the high cost of low living. He broke every vow of the Nazarites who were supposed to live a holy and separate life from all others. A Nazarite was never supposed to touch the dead, yet he touched the dead lion, they were never supposed to drink but he got drunk, and they were never to cut their hair, but Delilah cut his. Every vow he made to God, he broke. Samson's prayers that he prayed were about himself. We could ask the question how could God use such a person? Matthew Henry said the following,

"True faith is acknowledged and accepted, even when mingled with many failings"

This of course does not condone sin or waywardness in a believers life, but none-the-less it gives us hope, *in what way you might ask? Well, have any of us lived perfect lives before God? In submission, commitment, in our walk? When we look at our lives do we see or can we remember the things we said or done that we are not proud of?* You see when you look at Samson's life there is that kind of attitude that says, *"How in the world could God use such a person?"* But the more important question is *How on earth could God use me?* As you begin to think you realise that God can use us, He wants to use us, despite the fact that we are flawed, failed, weak, broken and inconsistent. We have not lived up to the light perfectly, but the grace and mercy of God has never failed us. Samson wasn't perfect but he accomplished what God wanted to accomplished which was, to bring a blow to the Philistine nation. Since we have come to the Lord He has kept all His promises to us and when we are weak He is strong. God has not cut us off, grace brings us back and we can know His strength once more in our lives. Faith is not dead.

Now Jephthah.

Jephthah's life account is found in Judges chapter 11 and 12. He was a mighty man of valour. He was the son of a harlot, whom His father had an affair with. As you go through, the account of Jephthah (whose name by the way means Yahweh opens or frees), he was a man that suffered rejection and abuse from his father's family who didn't want him to get any of the inheritance (11:2). In fact he was abused and rejected by his whole community. He left and found undesirable characters and banded with them becoming raiders (11:3), a criminal basically. Yet in spite of the terrible rejection and the awful career choice, God had His eye on him. In the same chapter verse 4, trouble was on the horizon and the elders of Gilead, where he was from, asked him to fight for them. He chose to rise above his circumstances

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but told them anyway how he felt about his years of their rejection. So Jephthah told them if he won, the deal was he would be their leader, which they agreed. When hostilities commenced Jephthah made a very foolish vow and prayed a very foolish prayer which is recorded for us in Judges 11:30-31. He said to God that whatever comes out of the doors of his house to meet him, he would sacrifice. And who only met him? His daughter. Scholars are split as to whether he actually kept the vow and sacrificed his daughter or if she just never married and therefore never had children. What a lesson in being careful, not just about what you pray for, but what you vow to God.

It is also a lesson that Faith can make you rise higher than the circumstances of your birth or the circumstances you grew up in. Some might recall a happy childhood, but there are some who can identify with Jephthah. Can God use such people? Maybe the question should be, "can I by faith ask the question, "Can God use me?". The answer is yes, God can and God will. As a believer we have hope, we have belief, we have faith. *Will we allow this world of brokenness and darkness, in which we now live, to define us by its criteria? Or will we in faith in God and His word allow His heart of love, His hand of power, His mind of all wisdom and knowledge to influence our thinking, and thereby be healed in mind and heart?* Faith lifts us up to heights, in spite of all our flaws and failures, even our background. It never flattens us in condemnation and hopelessness. Then the writer of Hebrews turns to a king and a king maker, David and Samuel. Two amazing character's.

David.

In 1 Samuel 16:11, David was the youngest in his family and a Shepard boy but he was chosen by God and anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel after Saul. As soon as Samuel anointed David, he was anointed with the Holy Spirit from that day forward, by the same token, the same day the Spirit left Saul. Note what it says, in verse 14 Saul became a troubled soul. Over the course of David's life, he was called by many titles; the shepherd of Israel, the sweet singer of Israel, the mighty soldier, the gentle servant, the wise statesman, the great sovereign of Israel. But the best that he was referred to was " a man after God's own heart", yet, he wasn't perfect, he was guilty of sin. When David was young, he slew a lion and a bear, he slew the giant Goliath by faith. Remember in 1 Samuel 17 in verse 47 he told the Philistines and Goliath when they were mocking him – *"Then all this assembly shall*

know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."

As David grew, he was brought through many trials, many ups and downs. He did not become King straight away, and King Saul was always after him to kill him. He must have had great faith to hold on to the promises that God gave him.

Do you think that when he was hiding in the caves, when it was cold and wet, that he wondered what it was like to be comfortable, never mind King? But his heart was always after God, hanging unto God's promises. When you look around at your own circumstances, maybe you feel like David in those caves... Uncomfortable, wondering when God will fulfil his promises.. But we need to be like David, to hold onto the promises and have our hearts set before God not on the circumstances; for we know that God works out all things in His perfect time. Remember during that time of waiting, David didn't moan, but he learnt a lot and done a lot of ground work to become a great King. Waiting on God, is never a waste of time if you allow Him to train you.

Even when he fell into sin, and the sentence of death hung over David's head; all the great titles did not mean anything or comfort him in any way. He had stepped out of the light into the darkness and how great was that darkness. But God! One of the most blessed terms of Scripture, "But God" did not abandon him to his own devices but in grace moved towards him. David not only acknowledged his sin but repented, however, there were terrible consequences. Some might ask, "Did Saul do anything like David?" "How come Saul did not make it into Hebrews 11?" It's true that both of them done terrible things, but the difference is, and there is a difference, David confessed and repented from his sin. Saul was sorrowful for being caught or for the consequences but not for his sin. In his darkest moment of temptation, David sometimes acted in the flesh and it proved the worst thing he ever faced but God did not cast him away and abandon him, He forgave him. He sent him help and gave him grace to repent, and he did. He was not only forgiven and freed, he was accepted and loved and dressed in robes of righteousness. By Grace, God kept him and by faith, he done great exploits for the Lord and for His people, because by faith David trusted God's Word and His promises, and the vision that God gave him.

This leads us to **Samuel**. 1 Samuel is where you find the account of Samuel. When Samuel spoke, people listened because they knew what he said was from God. His very life was a

miracle. Remember his mother, Hannah, went to the tabernacle praying for a child because she was barren and the second wife of her husband mocked her. She wept so bitterly that the priest Eli thought that she was drunk, but God heard her cry and allowed her to have Samuel, whom she dedicated back to the Lord. At the time of Samuel's birth, Israel was in no great shape spiritually, it was in chaos. The word of God was scarce in the land; they even treated the ark of God as a "good look charm" 1 Samuel 4:3. In fact, Eli who was the high priest, had two sons who were priests but were corrupt; and God moved in judgment and pronounced the end of Eli's house. The Lord never leaves Himself without a witness, and Samuel was brought to minister before the Lord at a very young age. Samuel was not just a priest, but he was a prophet and everyone knew he was anointed and appointed by God. He anointed Israel's first two Kings, Saul and David. Keeping this in mind, why do you think that Samuel was added to this list of warriors, though he was not a warrior? Because, Samuel fought battles equal to any soldier, however, his great foes were idolatry and immorality. He had to stand up in the middle of a polluted society and fearlessly speak God's truth. His severest opponents frequently were not the Philistines, the Amorites, or Ammonites—but his own people. It often takes more courage to stand up against our friends than against our enemies. Social pressure can be more frightening than military power. This prophet of God, who was also Israel's last judge, began "*ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod*" (1 Samuel 2:18) and continued faithful to God throughout his life. In the courage of faith, he ruled and prophesied.

Samuel was gracious, zealous, generous and faithful. He was God's man. In a time, when the land was completely corrupt and the country was marked by spiritual bankruptcy and apostasy, Samuel heard from God. We are living in a time now, when no-one really cares about the bible, or what God has to say. They don't read it, and don't believe what God's Word has to say about sin, the problem or the solution. But surely Samuel is a great example of standing up and trusting God in all circumstances, and the importance of speaking the truth even in a society who doesn't want to hear it.

Verse 32 of Hebrews 11 ends with '*and the prophets*'. The prophets are unnamed except for Samuel here. As the writer mentions in the opening of verse 32, he does not have time to go into detail about the many other faithful people of the Old Covenant, or even to mention

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them all by name. These prophets, just as Gideon, Barak, and the others, risked everything for the Lord. They courageously and confidently accepted God's commands and faced whatever opposition came along, by faith. They did not only fight on battlefields, but they had many victories in the Lord because they believed Him. They, too, conquered through the courage of faith. The prophets spoke for God and sealed their lives in God. They were people who would rather die than lie about what God had to say. They preferred to go to heaven with a good conscience, then remain on this earth living a lie. We see people who lived by faith and therefore unconquerable courage. Given all these examples – it brings us to verse 33 and 34 –

who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to fight the armies of the aliens.

How does faith subdued Kingdoms? Zechariah 4 verse 6 tells us :

Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts.

Moses couldn't have overcome Egypt by himself, nor could the Israelites if they were left to their own devices, but they left by faith. We are no different. God has his plans and God controls the destiny of empires. Remember Daniel's vision of the Kingdoms made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and iron mixed with clay, knocked down by the rock of heaven. God builds people up, and can bring them down. Why did God chose you? Why did he place you into the family you are in? into the community you are in into the time you are in? God has a purpose.

Next in the verse is *worked righteousness*, which isn't simply just working on an individual's virtues, but it means to have a right relationship with God, to stand right before God, in Christ. Exactly what God has done, and is doing in your life. When there are so many bad examples around us, bad examples of behaviour, relationships, even social constructs; we are called to be good examples, to shine the light of the gospel. These people we have looked at so far, not just believed God but they set examples. They believed and taught righteousness, they preached and obeyed God. Righteousness was worked out in their lives and we too need to step up to our calling and be great examples of what it is to live by faith, to live for the true and living God. When you see people who live lives that are confident and courageous, and

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true to God's word, we often think, my goodness, won't it be great to be like that, but then we doubt our qualifications, we doubt our abilities, sure, we really know the type of people we are.. don't we... But if you have any doubts, listen up this morning... You are being called and you are commissioned to greater things, don't settle for less. It's not about your greatness but God's. We live in a culture where they want to substitute the substance for a symbol.. but you are people of substance, it's time to come forward. People turn to the Lord when they see examples of the real deal, not the talk. Our lives should be marked by righteousness.

We have seen throughout this chapter that these people of faith, *obtained the promises*. Abraham, Moses, David and so on. God always keeps his promises and God will keep his promises to you. One of the most precious ones, and there's many, but one is.. He will return to get us and bring us to where he is.

Then the rest of the verse goes on to say that faith even *stops the mouth of Lions*.. Can anyone think of who this might be referring to? Yes, Daniel! From his youth, he lived by faith, remember, he refused to eat the king's food or bow to idols; then in his elderly years, he refused to follow the decree of the King not to pray. Daniel was praying based on revelation of God, he was not just praying because of religious duty or in defiance, sticking it to the king. Daniel continued to seek God and once the king found out what had happened, and who it was, he was upset by his very own decree. But it was just another situation where God showed his might even over the majestic lions, the king of beasts, to the King of Babylon.

Then the next example: *quenched the violence of fire*.. who pops into your minds here? Daniel 3 friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. The fire was so hot that those who were supposed to be taking care of it got burnt to death. The 3 friends went in, because they'd rather face the fire than face God knowing they had denied Him His rightful place. And what happened? The only things that burnt in that fire were the chains that bound them, because they were perfectly fine. They were thrown in as they were, turbans and all, but it did not touch them, but it did touch the King. He couldn't believe his eye, for he even saw a fourth person in the fire, in verse 26 of Daniel chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar said: "*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here.*"

You know the fiery trials and persecutions, not only helps us grow but also mature and often they can break things in our lives and set us free. How we deal with the tests that come into our lives can also be a great testimony if we by faith, go through them obediently and humbly before God, if we face them with courage and not complaint. Sometimes we need to chose faith not fear, reminding ourselves from the word of God, that God works all things out for his glory and our good ultimately.

Then, we have the *escaped the edge of the sword*. David faced the edge of the sword many times, just like many of the aforementioned, but so did Elijah (remember Jezebel's sword) and even Elisha (remember he asked God to open the eyes of his servant).

People of faith attain *strength out of weakness*. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12 verse 9

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

When you just think about the examples we have looked at today and what was used to overcome the enemy and not just who: Gideon used trumpets, empty pitchers, and torches, Jael used a Tent peg and hammer, Samson a jaw bone of a donkey.. that is just not the most common way to militarily overcome the enemy, *is it?* But God can take what man might see as weak, and make them strong. God uses the weak things, the foolish things, the broken, to obtain His victory. No wonder the bible says – Is there anything too difficult for God? No wonder it says, don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. God has chosen the foolish to confound the wise, he chooses the weak to put to shame those who consider themselves mighty.

It was because these people had faith, they could be *valiant in battle and turn to fight the armies*. It's here that we see that faith isn't always a noun but it is also a verb. It acts. Faith gives strength to act, it just doesn't become something, it does something. The time faith doesn't win is when fear creeps in, but in 1 John 4:18 says - *Perfect love casts out fear*.

These men and women of faith experienced fears and failures but it just goes to show, that didn't mean that they stopped being faithful, because of their inadequacies, their difficulties,

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their fear or failures, but they turned to God, who turned their hearts. We are not called to be successful but we are called to be faithful.

I want you think about what Edmund Burk the Anglo-Irish Stateman born here in Dublin in 1729 once wrote –

People crushed by laws, have no hope but to evade power. If the laws are their enemies, they will be enemies to the law; and those who have most to hope and nothing to lose will always be dangerous.

We are not people of the law, but of grace which brings much hope. Imagine how effective we could be.

Amen.