

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #30

Hebrews 11:30-31

Faith that pleases God is a faith that believes the written Word of God literally from Genesis to Revelation. The first ten illustrations of the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11 came from Genesis. The next illustration of great faith concerning Moses came from Exodus, and now as we come to these verses, we move ahead some forty years to two episodes that come to us from the book of Joshua.

Both episodes from Joshua are intertwined, and chronologically the story behind **verse 31** actually sets the stage for what happens in **verse 30**. From these episodes we learn this:

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD IS A FAITH THAT LITERALLY BELIEVES GOD'S WORD AND TOTALLY TRUSTS IN JESUS CHRIST FOR SALVATION AND FOR VICTORY.

Faith that saves is a faith that truly believes there is a coming future judgment, and in view of it turns to Jesus Christ by faith for salvation from it. Faith that is victorious literally believes and obeys God's Word.

HEROIC FAITH ILLUSTRATION #1 – The illustration of the faith of Israel in the destruction of Jericho. **11:30**

This is a big-time moment for Israel. It is now time for Israel to begin to take the Promised Land.

The background for this story comes from Joshua 5:13-6:1-24. Moses had died and Joshua was in charge (Joshua 1:1). Israel had finally crossed the Jordan river and Joshua himself had come to the vicinity of the city Jericho (Joshua 5:13). He was going to personally look it over and came upon some imposing figure who had his sword drawn (Joshua 5:13).

Joshua confronted him as to whose side he was on and he was told that he was the “captain of the host of the LORD” (Joshua 5:14). Actually, **this captain is none other than Jesus Christ in a preincarnate appearance (theophany)**. This is the second Member of the Trinity and that is why Joshua fell on his face and removed his sandals, because he was standing on holy ground (Joshua 5:15). This is why this is such a critical story in Hebrews; this is a story about trusting Jesus Christ and following the Word of God literally for victory over major enemies.

What Joshua and Israel were about to learn was that God was the One who would protect them and God was the One who would give them victory if they would literally believe what His Word said and obey it.

Now the pre-battle ritual that you see in Joshua is like no pre-battle ritual you will ever read in any military journal or textbook. What God tells Israel to do to prepare for victory is nothing you would ever learn at West Point. What you are about to see is certainly no secret ninjas tactic. Frankly, this is a good way to get shot, march around a city out in the open.

What God's Word told them to do was to take "the ark of the covenant" which contained the Word of God (Joshua 6:6) and go right out in the open and march around the city one time for six straight days without saying one word (Joshua 6:10).

Years ago, I spoke with a man who had been in the special forces of the military and he told me that they teach unpredictability is the key to success. In other words, if you want to defeat the enemy don't do the predictable, do the unpredictable. He said they would never walk down the same path twice but would use different routes. Here is the nation Israel right out in the open doing the predictable, walking around the city every day.

Now the distance around the city according to archeologists is about an eight to nine acre walk. At a consistent pace, you could make one trip around the entire city in about fifteen to twenty minutes which is the average time it takes the average person to walk about one mile.

The order of the procession looked something like this:

- 1) Armed soldiers - there is a total of at least 40,000 (Joshua 4:13). Joshua 6:9a
- 2) Seven priests carrying trumpets. Joshua 6:9b
- 3) The "ark of the covenant" was carried by more priests following trumpet priests. Joshua 6:6, 8
- 4) The people. Joshua 6:7
- 5) The rearguard of soldiers following the ark. Joshua 6:13

The seven priests carrying trumpets were to blow as they went around Jericho to show the importance of the Word of God. **I want you to notice that "the ark of the covenant" or "ark of the LORD" is mentioned some ten times (Joshua 6:4, 6, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 13). This was all about God making a statement concerning Himself and His precious Word.**

On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times (Joshua 6:15). For the average person this would take about two hours. After the seventh time they were to blow the trumpets with a long single blast (6:5) and the people were to shout (6:5, 16). When they did, the "wall of the city fell down flat" (6:20) and they went into the city and took it because God gave them victory.

Now I want you to think about what you would be seeing and thinking if you were one of the people who lived in Jericho. Jericho was a strong, fortified city with a strong military, and every military history that you can study will teach you that the way to capture or conquer a foe is by force. In order to defeat an enemy you need a strong military that can bombard and attack. So if you were living in Jericho and every day you saw a group of people who are marching around your city carrying a golden box, blowing trumpets, they would look like, as Kent Hughes said, a bunch of "clowns" (*Hebrews*, p. 128). This was absurd. They were no threat because all you have are people carrying, as it were, one copy of the Bible blowing on rams' horns every now and then.

This was a big leap of faith for the children of Israel, because God's Word was asking them to literally believe the Word of God when it went against all normative of human logic. You just don't conquer military cities with a Bible and trumpets. But this is what God's Word told them to do and this is what Israel did because they believed it literally.

I do not know what your Jericho is tonight, but I do know this; you can literally trust in Jesus Christ and believe God's Word. You can place your faith totally and completely in Jesus Christ and in the Word of God and you can apply it literally. Perhaps you are facing the Jericho enemy of something physical, or financial, or emotional, or spiritual. You can trust God for victory. You can depend on His Word, and at times a literal faith in God's Word will defy worldly human logic.

Now the main faith point of this illustration is on the fact that God is the One who delivers His people and gives them victory. What God's people did was carefully obey the Word of God without even opening their mouths and God gave them victory.

This is the point. When God's leaders and God's people literally believe and obey the Word of God, they will experience tremendous victory and blessings.

HEROIC FAITH ILLUSTRATION #2 – The illustration of the faith of Rahab in the salvation from destruction of Jericho. **11:31**

Rahab is one of the most amazing stories of faith that you will ever see. She is an O.T. example of a Gentile who was a depraved sinner who experienced the salvation of God. She was a harlot, a prostitute, who experienced the pure grace of God by faith and she ends up in the lineage of Jesus Christ and she ends up a faith hero in **Hebrews 11:31**.

C. I. Scofield said, "No more unlikely character than Rahab could have been divinely chosen for deliverance from ungodly Jericho. The salvation of Rahab, the prostitute, illustrates that even in a doomed city a wicked individual could find grace by turning to God in faith" (*Scofield Reference Bible*, NASV, p. 309).

The background for this story is found in Joshua 2:1-24 and Joshua 6:17, 25. Now let's set the stage for this. There are seven facts I want us to see:

(Fact #1) - Joshua secretly sent two spies on a reconnaissance mission into Jericho to assess it. 2:1

They were being sent from Shittim located about seven miles east of the flooded Jordan (2:1/3:15), and Jericho is located about five miles west of the Jordan so these two spies had to travel about twelve miles from where they were. They needed to sneak in and take a good look and get out. This was the first major military city that needed to be conquered if Israel were to take this Promised Land.

(Fact #2) - The spies are housed by Rahab a Gentile prostitute. 2:1

I don't care whether or not you like this fact, but here is the fact - Rahab was a harlot (ἡ πόρνη). She was one given over to immoral sexual activity. She ran a business of prostitution. This point is stressed in Joshua 2:2; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25. She was a woman who made her living by taking money for immoral sex.

Her life had been seedy, scary, shameful, and sinful. There is no getting around this point and this is a very critical point stressed several times in Scripture. This woman will become one of the great women of God.

The faith of this previously immoral woman will become something that will be honored forever. In fact, Rahab becomes a great encouragement for those who perhaps have had some immoral encounter in their own lives.

Now the spies chose Rahab's house as their base of operations. There are probably a couple reasons why they picked this house.

- A. They wanted to hide in a place where they would not be suspected as being Hebrew spies, so they went to the home of a Gentile prostitute. They probably figured most would think they were traveling merchants who decided to spend the night the way most godless, traveling merchants spend a night, at a house of prostitution.
- B. They could get good information about Jericho at a house of a prostitute, because she entertained all kinds of men from the city. Apparently high-powered, political men.

(Fact #3) - Word leaked out to the king of Jericho that they were hiding at Rahab's house. 2:2-3

Obviously some of the king's informants spotted these two and suspected they were Israelis and the king sent word to Rahab that he wanted them turned over to him. Rahab was obviously a high-class harlot because she was known by the king. Apparently their plan backfired (2:2).

(Fact #4) - Rahab risks her life to protect the two spies from Israel. 2:4-7

There were two ways she protected them:

Way #1 - She hid the spies. 2:4, 6

Rahab took the two men up on top of her house and put stalks of flax over them. Stalks of flax were stalks about three feet long. They were pulled up at harvesttime and put up on rooftops to dry. They were first soaked in water for three to four weeks to separate the fibers and taken to the roof to dry in the sun so that the flax could be made into linen. We want to observe something here. God is truly protecting these spies, but they are not walking out in the open like Israel would do at Jericho. We must use our brain to protect ourselves and then trust God to do the rest.

Way #2 - She lied for the spies. 2:4-7

Actually Rahab tells four lies to the leaders of Jericho:

Lie #1 - She did not know they were from Israel. 2:4b/9 - She did actually know.

Lie #2 - She saw the men leave the city. 2:5a - She knew they hadn't even left her house.

Lie #3 - She did not know where the men went. 2:5b - She knew they were up on her roof.

Lie #4 - She knows they can overtake them if they hurry. 2:5c - She knew they wouldn't find them.

Now I have read page after page of those who have questioned this lying business of Rahab, but the fact is, for her it was a demonstration of faith in God. She was willing to do whatever it took to protect these two men of God and frankly she is honored for it.

Suppose you had been in Tucson last week and a gunman came in and asked you where a congresswoman was. Suppose you knew. Would you tell him? Suppose a man with a knife knocks on your door and asks if your spouse is home. Would you tell him? Obviously, no way! You would do your best to protect the innocent. That is what Rahab did and God honored her for it.

(Fact #5) - Rahab informs the spies what she believes. 2:8-11

The faith of Rahab was a very factual faith that literally believed the Word of God:

- 1) Rahab believed that God was going to give Israel the Promised Land. 2:9a
- 2) Rahab believed God was a God to be feared because of what He did for Israel. 2:9b-11a
- 3) Rahab believed Israel's God is the one true God of heaven and earth. 2:11b

(Fact #6) - Rahab asks for grace salvation for her and her family. 2:12-13

(Fact #7) - The spies agree to save Rahab and her family. 2:14-22

The spies, who had hid out in her home, told Rahab to keep quiet about this and told her to dangle the scarlet cord out her window (Joshua 2:18-19). It could not be just any thread or any color of thread, it had to be a scarlet thread. **One question is why not blue or green or orange thread, why scarlet?** What is the significance of this scarlet color?

Ironically, we get the answer from the book of Hebrews 9:19-22. This scarlet color is illustrative of the shed blood that God requires for forgiveness of sins. This scarlet thread was the basis of her salvation. It was this act that ultimately saved her and her family. Dr. C. I. Scofield observed, "The scarlet cord of Rahab may speak, by its color, of safety through sacrifice (Hebrews 9:19-22)" (*Ibid.*, p. 310). This scarlet cord speaks of being saved from God's wrath by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Rahab says to all of us, you may have lived a life of debauchery and depravity, sexually speaking, but you can end up a champion of faith and end up a great statement for Jesus Christ and the grace of God. You may have been a person who has had so many immoral encounters that you cannot remember them all or even count them all. You can be washed clean.

Rahab believed in God and she literally believed the Word of God. We know that because of what she says in Joshua 2:9-11. She believed that God had given Israel the Promised Land and she asked the two spies to deal with her in grace.

Can you imagine the story that Rahab could tell as an older godly woman? What a life she lived. She had been born in the land of the Canaanites and she pursued a life of sinful pleasure, and then one day God, in His amazing grace, saved her and not only put her in His family, but put her in the actual pedigree of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). She ended up marrying Salmon, a prince of Judah and through this relationship came the King of Kings. What a story of grace. When Jericho collapsed, everything except one small section of the city was destroyed. One family escaped the wrath of God. There was one scarlet cord that dangled from a window that meant some did not experience the wrath of God.

Now I want to use these two verses to illustrate a saving faith analogy based on N.T. doctrine. The whole world is under the wrath of God just as the whole city Jericho was under the wrath of God. All in the world are doomed just as all in Jericho were doomed. All people living in the world are under the condemnation of God just as all who were living in Jericho were under the condemnation of God.

But there is a way of escape. There is a scarlet thread that can save sinners and even though your sins be as scarlet they can be as white as snow. That way of escape is Jesus Christ.