

The Book of Hebrews Year 2 Bible Study Lesson 16

Hebrews 11:30-31 Notes

Faith That Demonstrates Courage

Introduction:

Hebrews 11:30-31 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

(MacArthur) We have been reminded, all the way through this chapter, that anyone who has a relationship with God has that relationship based on faith and not on works. We have started all the way back in the book of Genesis to see the examples of faith, or as they're often known, the heroes of faith.

And the message of the New Testament is that by the deeds of the flesh no person will be justified. "We're saved by grace through faith, that not of yourselves" - not of works – "lest any man should boast," as the New Testament epistles inform us. There is no way to come to God by works, by effort, on one's own – moral effort, spiritual effort, religious effort. You hear people today who are proud to say they are religious or, perhaps more popular, proud to say they are spiritual. That gains them nothing with God. No matter how extensive their efforts are at religion or spirituality or morality or ceremony, they achieve absolutely nothing, because even the best that men can do, their righteousness are filthy rags to God.

So, the message of the New Testament is the message that salvation is by faith alone. That is a message that is a dramatic change for the Jewish hearers, and so it needs to be defended as the true Word of God, lest they think that this is some kind of new message, that the gospel of grace and faith is some aberration, that it is something opposed to the Old Testament. And so, the writer of Hebrews gives us this jewel of a book that not only was beneficial to the Jews to whom it was written, but for all who will read it through all time, to reinforce the fact that salvation by faith alone is not something that the New Testament invents, but is the age old and only way that anyone has ever been reconciled to God.

The message here is those who are related to God are related to God because they came to Him by faith, and they continue to live by faith. Life may be difficult. What God requires may be bizarre; it may be against the grain of your own nature, your own will; it may be contrary to culture; it may seem unreasonable; it may call suffering; it may bring human mockery upon your head; it may mean separation from the world; it may cost you your ambitions; it may even cost you your life, but you do it because God said to do it. That's what marks the people of God; they obey God. That's what a relationship to God is

about. It is about obedience. You obey His call to salvation and repentance and faith. You obey His call to a life of obedience.

Others, however, in that Jewish community, had heard it. They made some kind of an intellectual commitment to its veracity, but no heart commitment to it. They were outwardly identified with this local group of true believing Jews, but they had fallen short of genuine salvation so that through this book repeatedly, there are warnings to this group of intellectually convinced Jews hanging on to the fringe of the church that they have to come all the way to salvation. Do not neglect the salvation. That's what is in chapter 2, "Don't neglect so great a salvation; don't stop short of that." In chapters 4 and 5 it's, "Come all the way to rest." In chapter 6 it's "Don't fall away, because if you fall away with full revelation, it's impossible to be renewed to repentance." And in chapter 10, it's a warning that if you reject the gospel with the knowledge you have, you crucify the Son of God, and you put him to open shame. And how far greater will the judgment, the eternal punishment be on someone who does that.

So, the warning passages come throughout this epistle. To those who were there in the congregation, they will hear this epistle when it is read; they need to be warned. And so do any others in any generation who have intellectually assented to the gospel but have never made the affirmation.

One, very strong and compelling motivation for them to embrace the gospel is to assure them that it is not a new message, but it is the same old message that God will reconcile with sinners only one way, and that is by faith.

The message, then, of Hebrews 11 is that the way of salvation has always been by faith. Don't fall back into Judaism. Don't fall back into old Judaistic patterns. Be willing to break with the priesthood which is now obliterated. When the temple veil was rent from top to bottom, the priesthood was over. The holy of holies was thrown wide open for anyone and everyone. Make the break. The message of the book is come all the way to Christ. Drop the old stuff, come to Christ, come to Him, come to God by faith. That is the only way. And that, of course, has been the Christian gospel and the Christian message.

This chapter had an introduction in Hebrews 10:38, "My righteous one shall live by faith," or that very common understanding of it, taken from Habakkuk, "The just shall live by faith." You've got to live by faith, the only way you can have spiritual life. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

Courage, a Test of Faith:

We now come to some illustrations of faith that are really remarkable. And here we see the courage of faith. That is a component of faith that you could actually identify as sort of the pentacle of faith. I guess you could say that the validating of anybody's faith is what it will endure. If it's true faith, it will obey at any price. It will demonstrate courage in the face of any opposition, any threat,

any suffering. True faith does not draw back; it does not fold up; it does not collapse.

Any kind of faith in God, any kind of professed faith in Christ that crumbles under certain pressures is not a true faith. This is demonstrated to us in the teaching of our Lord in the sermon on the soils where He describes some people, who on the surface look like they're open to receiving the message, and the seed goes into what He calls the rocky soil, and for a little while it springs up, and it looks like a wonderful response – and even classifies it as the fact that the word or the word of the gospel is received with joy. But then He says when the sun comes out, the roots in that kind of soil can't penetrate to go down deep and get the water because there's rock bed right below the surface.

The sun burns the plant, and it dies never having borne fruit. And Jesus says, "The sun symbolizes thlipsis" – pressure, persecution. That's the test! Or it may be that kind of soil that's full of weeds and thorns, never letting go of the love of the world, the love of this age, the love of riches. And eventually that chokes out the Word. There are all kinds of temporary believers. And there are pressures that come upon all of us that inevitably reveal who's faith is real.

The Defeat of Jericho:

Now we find the generation that is able to go into the Promised land. Israel has come out of the wilderness, crossed the Jordan River, and has arrived. Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel. They had been told that the children of Israel were nearby. They were massive, but its unknown as to the exact number that ended up entering the Promised Land.

Jericho had already been spied out by Israel's two spies and Jericho was now on lockdown because of the sons of Israel. No one went out, no one came in. We're reminded of the walls of Jericho – teichos in the Greek, referring to an outer wall – the great, massive city wall that surrounded the city of Jericho. And the Lord said to Joshua, 'See, I've given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. Just do that for six days. And seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead.'"

Natural human skepticism would say, "Could you go over that again" What? We're going to conquer how? We're going to march around the wall once a day, for six days, and then on the seventh day we're going to march around the wall, and the seventh time we're going to shout at the top of our voice, and the walls are just going to fall out flat?" I would conclude that obedience to this

command would be an act of faith; wouldn't you? It seems such a strange thing. And, of course, you know the story. That's exactly what they did. The wall fell down flat so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city. They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." It was a massive slaughter, then the city was burned.

So, here we are at the entrance into the land of Canaan, the land of promise, and there's a demonstration of faith – faith on the part of Joshua, who's the leader, and faith on the part of the people of Israel. This is their first obstacle, and it's the test of their faith. Are they going to believe God when He tells them what He wants them to do? Jericho was a strong city. It was barred, it was fortified. To take it seemed an impossible task. It was fortified on purpose because it was the guardian city of the southern part of the land of Israel. It is one of the cities that scared the earlier spies and caused them to stay back in the wilderness from Deuteronomy 1:28, "The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven."

What about the destruction of the Canaanites? Can you legitimize that? Historians tell us that the destruction of this Canaanite city and all Canaanite culture was a great boom to the welfare of humanity from a purely social perspective; they were so debased. God punishes sin, and He has a right to punish it whenever and wherever He desires. And He punishes those who do not believe in Him and do not obey His commands.

You know, this reminds us that God delights in slaying the pride of men. Not only the pride of the Jews who probably thought they could conquer Jericho just by their sheer force, even though they had no army, and they had no weapons. But even more so, God delights in slaying the pride of men with regard to the Philistines. Thinking back how they were defeated by a shepherd boy and a stone, and here the land of Canaan suffers its first defeat when people simply walk around its walls and blow a horn and shout. But the people exhibit faith in their God. That is the testimony of Scripture; that is the testimony of God.

Four Degrees of Faith:

1. Faith which Receives: When the empty-handed beggars come and receive what God has to give, that's one component of faith. It is the simplest faith to receive the gift, to receive God's salvation. There is a need for God.
2. Faith which Reckons: To see and understand that God has made promises, and we can count on God to fulfill them. And that His promises are massive that stretch into the endless eons of eternity.
3. Faith that Risks: Because God's promises grip our hearts and we are held in confidence of who He is, faith begins to dare to be obedient in any circumstance.

4. Faith that Rests: Even through suffering, our faith is unmoved. Faith rules the life of a true believer. The believer rests in the living God being with us every step of the way, resting in who God is, so faith gains the victory.

True Faith Obeys Their Creator:

The demonstration of faith is always obedience. Faith and obedience are inseparable. When it says to come to Christ and put your faith in Him, that's a command. And if you do that, that's an act of obedience.

The gospel is a command. It is a command to repent and believe. Salvation comes to those who obey. And everything after that in the life of faith, is obeying what God has commanded, obeying what God has demanded. So, faith is demonstrated in obedience, the kind that has courage, the kind that will occur no matter what the price, no matter what the cost.

True faith has the courage to believe God in impossible conflict, with ridiculous orders and incredible promises. And the experience at Jericho is an illustration of that kind of faith, to do what seems ridiculous, unnecessary, foolish. But what marks faith is obedience.

Rahab's Faith:

Hebrews 11:31 "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace." Interesting that the word "disobedient" is there; it's the opposite of faith demonstrated. The Holy Spirit chooses the next illustration of faith – conquering faith, courageous faith – and it belonged, of all people, to a prostitute. Well, we know one thing, if there were any Jews still believing you got into the kingdom of God by works, it would be hard to figure out how Rahab got into this list. She sort of blasts the sensibilities of the Jews in the community who are still hanging on to the notion that salvation is given to those who earn it. She's a Canaanite, not even a Jew; she's a Gentile; she's an Amorite. And the Amorites, their whole seed was devoted to utter destruction being cursed by God. But Rahab believed God. And one of the staggering realities about Rahab is she ended up in the messianic line.

Now, there were, of course, in Jericho, unbelievers who perished, disobedient. People of Jericho didn't believe; they didn't obey. This implies that the truth of God had been deposited in their midst. They must have received the Word of God to believe or not to believe, to obey or not to obey. Some translations say they believe not, but it's *apeitheo* which means disobedient. They must have heard the truth about the true and living God. They sought no mercy from the God of Israel. They had no interest in obeying Him whatsoever. As a result, the whole city was wiped out.

Rahab helped the spies from Israel that Joshua sent to Jericho. She kept them safe and then provided a way for them to escape by standing up against

Jericho's king. Rahab believed in the true and living God, and she believed fully in all the revelation that was available to her.

Joshua told the spies to bring Rahab out with all her relatives to Israel. He spared Rahab and her family and they lived in the midst of Israel to this day.

Conclusion:

Only the silver and gold, and articles of bronze and iron, Israel put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. The city of Jericho was rejected and destroyed. Rahab and her family were spared.

Rahab acknowledged faith in the true and living God. She believed and staked her life on it. She put herself in a dangerous position, hiding spies on the roof. She staked her life on the fact that this was the true God.

According to Matthew 1:5 Rahab is placed into the birth line of the Messiah. She is the mother of Boaz from the book of Ruth. She is the great-great-grandmother to King David.

Rahab had the faith that has the courage to stand in the midst of dire danger. That's what faith does. It doesn't crumble because of circumstances are threatening or difficult. True saving faith, true faith that grips God does what is right, obeys God no matter what the price.

(Warren Wiersbe) Some practical points to consider as we face our own "Jerichos":

- A. **The soldier who wants to fight the best must bow the lowest before the battle (Joshua 5:13-15).** We win our battles on our knees and on our faces before the Lord.
- B. **No one can take a city alone.** Joshua had the loyal cooperation of the priests and people, and together they overcame the enemy.
- C. **When we follow God's methods, He wins the battle and he gets the glory.** This is why He uses such "foolish methods." When we use our own schemes and systems, we might get the glory but the victory never lasts.
- D. **Unbelief looks at the walls and giants (Num. 13:28), but faith looks to the Lord.** "Obstacles are those nasty little things we see when we take our eyes off the goal." And, we might add, when we take our eyes off the Lord. God's commandments are God's enablements.
- E. **We see the grace of God at work even in judgment, for Rahab and her family were saved by faith.** Is there a suggestion here that "few will be saved" when God's judgment finally does fall on this world?

References:

John MacArthur Commentary of the Book of Hebrews
Sermon from John MacArthur, GraceChurch.org, "A Conquering, Courageous Faith"
Warren W. Wiersbe - Expository Outlines