



The Faith of Joshua and the Israelites

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 11:30; Joshua 6:1-16

November 13, 2016

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Faith Like a Diamond This 11th chapter of Hebrews is an absolute treasure for every human being who has placed their unreserved faith in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior. The lessons that we learn in this text, the pictures that we see of real, vibrant, saving faith, starting with Abel all the way through Moses, so far, are indispensable to our understanding of the what authentic faith is all about. Through these various examples, it is as if the writer of Hebrews is holding before our eyes the diamond of genuine, saving faith in the Lord and slowly rotating it to reveal various facets of the substance and operation of active and living trust in Almighty God.

Through the lives of each of these various people – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses – we have seen the facets of true saving faith. Faith that trusts in the right sacrifice for sins, faith that worships God in the right way, faith that speaks and testifies to God’s worth and to the gospel, faith that pleases God, faith that obeys God, faith that acts, faith that trusts God’s Word implicitly, faith that looks to the future reward without getting discouraged, faith that chooses the hard and costly right over the easy wrong, faith that beholds the power of God and believes in His character – faith that is not something to merely celebrate in the lives of the saints of old, but faith that can and should be ours. Faith that should define our own lives in this world in which we live.

This chapter was a much-needed tonic to the souls of the Hebrew Christians who first received this letter from their pastor who was in jail for his faith. It was a much needed encouragement and exhortation to remain faithful to Christ, to seek to grow in their faith, tempted as they were, to return to Judaism and to forsake Christ in order to escape the persecution around them. It a much needed word to us in this pluralistic world where we hear that every path to God is legitimate, that we are all worshipping the same God in different ways, that every religion and belief is legitimate, and where we are tempted to loosen our grip on Christ, to loosen our grip on the absolute truth of the Word of God in

order to fit in. We need this great cloud of examples, this great cloud of witnesses in order that we would **“lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and... run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...”** (Hebrews 12:1–2, ESV)

In the text that we are looking at today, the writer of Hebrews seeks to flesh out, even more, a full understanding of authentic faith by fast-forwarding some 40 years, and that is telling. From his perspective, there are no more illustrations of faith to be found in the first generation of Israelites who were delivered from the oppression of Egypt. Although this generation had seen firsthand the power and the glory of God in his judgment of Egypt, in the Passover, and at the Red Sea, they soon fell away in disbelief and failed to enter the Promised Land. You remember what we read in Hebrews 3, **“For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”** (Hebrews 3:16–19, ESV) Now, after that generation of faithless people had perished in the wilderness, the writer of Hebrews wants to point us to the story of the faith of this second generation, some 40 years later. And he wants to show us in the story of Jericho that faith leads to victory.

Joshua and the Israelites – Faith is the Victory (30) The Apostle John wrote in I John 5, **“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”** (1 John 5:4, ESV) And the writer of Hebrews illustrates this truth perfectly in chapter 11:30. There he writes: **“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.”** (Hebrews 11:30, ESV) Now, to understand the importance of what the writer of Hebrews is saying, we need a little backstory. Again, he can do this in shorthand because it is a story that the Hebrew Christians would have known from their childhood, but we need to do a little history lesson.

At this point in Israel’s history, 40 years after the triumph of the Red Sea, Moses had died and had been buried by God in a secret place on the far side of the Jordan River, having seen from afar, the Promised Land. At his death, Joshua, who had been Moses’ right hand man, who was himself a man of faith and a capable general in Israel, became the nation’s leader. God gave to him the responsibility and calling to lead the Israelites into the possession of the

Promised Land. God had called Joshua to this task and to faith, saying, **“Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”**” (Joshua 1:6–9, ESV)

And we see from the response of the people, the 2nd generation of Israelites who had seen their parents and grandparents fall in the wilderness as a result of their unbelief, that they had learned the vital need for faith. They responded to Joshua’s command to prepare to enter the Promised Land by saying, **“All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses! Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous.”**” (Joshua 1:16–18, ESV) They had learned the lesson that faith and obedience leads to life and that unbelief and disobedience leads to death. So they were ready to follow Joshua.

Joshua did indeed lead the people of Israel across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. It was an amazing scene. God gave to Joshua instructions for the priests in Israel to carry the Ark of the Covenant, the emblem of God’s real presence with them, God’s throne on this earth, into the midst of the Jordan River. They did just that and amazingly the Jordan River stopped flowing, the upstream waters piled up like mini Red Sea, and the nation crossed over the river on dry ground. But now they were faced with the first great obstacle to taking possession of the Promised Land, Jericho.

Jericho was a fortified city, surrounded by towering walls, men of war patrolling its ramparts, that made it seem absolutely impregnable. And to the Israelites, in their own power, it was. And yet, as the writer of Hebrews says, **By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.** How did it happen?

Well, at some point, while the Israelites were camped at Gilgal, about 2 miles from Jericho, Joshua went out to survey the scene. Interesting note about Gilgal – its name means “rolling away” and it was there that this generation of Israelites were circumcised and where they celebrated the first Passover in the Promised Land, God “rolling away” the faithlessness of the generation before them and giving them a fresh start. Anyway, while Joshua was overlooking Jericho, he had an amazing encounter. **“When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” And the commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.”** (Joshua 5:13–15, ESV)

Here is Joshua, by himself, overlooking Jericho when he raises his eyes and sees a man, a warrior in battle dress, a man standing before him with sword drawn ready for battle, bare and gleaming before Joshua’s eyes. He says the only thing he can think to say, **Are you for us, or for our adversaries?** And it is then that Joshua comes to the sudden realization, that the man before him is no mere man. **I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.** This is no mere man but God Himself, the pre-incarnated Christ, the Lord of Hosts. Joshua is overcome; he falls to his face on the ground and worships, ready to receive the commands of the Living God. The time to take Jericho is now. The commander of the Army of the Lord is here. Joshua is on holy ground, ground made holy by the presence of God, and like Moses before him, he takes the sandals from his feet. It’s an awesome scene. And then comes the instructions, the divine battle plan for the overthrow of Jericho.

“And the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.”” (Joshua 6:2–5, ESV) To faithless eyes, to a faithless heart, this doesn’t seem like much of

plan, does it? No siege works, no battering rams, no tactical application of force. To march around a wall for seven days and to blow some horns... the Joint Chiefs of Staff would laugh at that.

But there is no record of Israel balking at these commands, no criticism, no tweaking of the whole thing, no re-evaluation and addition of human wisdom or what seemed like a better idea to them, no record of any opposition to the plan at all. They do exactly what God says. Israel, as a whole, led by Joshua, trusts the Word of God, trusts His unconventional plans of war. That, at least to me, is remarkable. Why did God do it this way? I mean, God could have just crushed all of Israel's enemies and paved the path to victory without Israel having to exercise faith or act in faith at all – just send a plague, or a strong wind, fire from heaven, anything. But that's just the point. Yes, God was going to give them the Promised Land but He was also going to develop their faith and their confidence in Him along the way. There is a purpose in all that God does. Victory over this seemingly insurmountable opponent, Jericho, could only come when Israel did not trust in their own strength or human wisdom but trusted wholeheartedly in the Lord. But they had to have trust. They had to have faith.

Again, to Israel's credit, they did just what God commanded. Imagine the scene, as they marched around the city walls for six days. The men of war looking down at them from their lofty heights had to sneer and mock them, must have thought that what they were doing was laughable and odd. Marching silently around the walls, carrying a golden box, being led by some guys blowing on horns? Not very intimidating, right? Or maybe it was. Whatever, on the seventh day, when they marched around the city seven times, God's presence with them, and the priests blew their horns, Israel's warriors shouted, the walls fell down, and Jericho was conquered, all by faith in God. That's the testimony of the writer of Hebrews. Incredible, right? Faith is the victory.

Now listen, here's the thing we have to understand. Faith is not some mystic, magical, mythical force. Real faith, faith in God and not in ourselves or in the power of faith, links us to the unseen, almighty God. Faith is the channel through which God's blessings flow to us. God has chosen faith, simple trust in Him, in His character, in His Word and in His might, as the instrument through which He displays in the life of His people His power and strength. Faith in God is powerful, only because God is powerful. It is a faith by which we begin our lives with God and a faith that must continue to grow. Jesus said: ***“For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to***

there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.'” (Matthew 17:20, ESV)

Don't misunderstand Christ's words here. The principle of a mustard seed is not that it is small and tiny and that it stays that way. The principle of the mustard seed is that it begins small but it persists in growing and growing until it is great, large, substantial. True and living faith in the Lord, because it connects us to God makes possible the accomplishment of extraordinary things, things that are impossible by ordinary human means. The fall of Jericho is a witness to that truth. Faith brought Israel to the Promised Land and by faith they would take possession of it. Conquering faith obeys what God has commanded. You see, one of the things that Jericho illustrates for us is this: when you are in battle for spiritual progress, a battle for faithfulness, a battle for spiritual growth, a battle to remain whole-heartedly committed to God, that is not the time for novelty, not the time for human ingenuity, not the time for human wisdom – it is the time to trust in the Commander of the army of the Lord.

Think about it like this. We lay hold of eternal life by faith, right? By personal trust and conscious dependence upon Jesus Christ, upon Who He is and what He has done for us in His body on the tree. We are not saved because of our merit, or by some good works, or because we are spiritually smarter than anyone else – we are saved by the work of Christ that we lay hold of by personal faith in Him -- by conscious dependence upon Christ and his life of obedience by which he earned righteousness with God for us, his bloody death by which he paid the penalty of our sins which we could never pay, and His resurrection from the dead in which He destroyed the power of death

We lay hold of eternal life by faith BUT we **lay hold of the Christian life, we progress in the transformed life, endure and persevere and triumph in the Christian life by faith**, true faith, real faith – by union with Christ, by conscious reliance and trust in Him and His grace and irresistible power to sanctify and refine us and make us truly holy, faith that makes us see that His way is better than sin, faith that if we trust Him He will make of our lives something infinitely better than sin could promise or deliver, faith that His will is more wise than sinful desires, faith that His promises to heal our hearts and souls from the ravages of sin is real and actual, faith that He will use us as instruments of ministry, faith that He will use us to proclaim the gospel and to testify to His glorious worth, faith that His reward is more satisfying, faith that He will preserve us in this life against all enemies until we see him face-to-face.

It is faith in Him that fits us for battle. **“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.”** Israel won an impossible victory. That’s what the writer of Hebrews tells us. We must understand that in our living by faith, **“the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.”** (2 Corinthians 10:4, ESV) Those who are walking in the Spirit, who are walking by faith, have stopped fighting with fleshly weapons; they have learned to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and quench the fiery darts of the wicked One by the shield of faith. The man or woman of faith wins his victories on his knees, and then stands still and sees the salvation of the Lord. “Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city.”

Here’s the thing, beloved. The initial act of faith in Jesus Christ and growing faith in Him will bring you increasing conflict with things with which you did not have conflict before. You will be brought into conflict with a world that does not know Jesus Christ and lives like it. You will be brought into conflict with worldly ways of thinking that you must bring into subjection to the Word of God. You will be brought into conflict with sin that once ruled uncontested in your soul, that now you can no longer ignore or let master you. It seems like a daunting thing. But consider the power of faith in Christ – it defeats the powers of hell, conquers the scourge of death, it renews your thinking, it makes clear the gulf between righteousness and unrighteousness, between obedience and sin and it defeats the power of sin and empowers obedience. And this begs the question...

Do We Really Trust God? Do we really believe in the power of God? Do we really believe that God is trustworthy? Do we really trust Him like the Israelites at Jericho? Our immediate response is “Yes, of course we do...” right? None of us would ever say out loud, “I do not believe in the power of God in Christ. I don’t believe that God is trustworthy.” That would be bad form. But do we believe in character and in the power of God in such a way that we are committed to obeying Christ, and doing things His way, to praying and trusting rather than complaining or fretting, to seeking first His righteousness and believing that everything else needful will be added to us? True faith in God results in an abiding peace and rest in your soul. Charles Spurgeon said, **There is no more blessed way of living, than the life of faith based upon a covenant-keeping God – to know that we have no care, for He cares for us; that we need have no fear, except to fear Him; that we need have no troubles, because we have cast our burdens upon the Lord, and are conscious that He will sustain us.**

The foundation of Christianity, the foundation of our faith, is trust in God, trusting Him implicitly and fully. Believing His words to us, trusting His promises, resting all of our confidence in Him and yet it is a constant battle, a constant fight to place our confidence in what we cannot see over what we can see.

One of the greatest lessons of life we need to learn is to put our full and complete trust in God and He will continually put us in places, put us in circumstances, put us in situations where we must trust in Him completely. He did that with Joshua and the Israelites at Jericho. He does it with us, corporately and individually, because faith and trust is indispensable to spiritual life and vitality. The psalmist said, **“Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.”** (Psalm 4:5, ESV) **“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge (who puts his trust) in him!”** (Psalm 34:8, ESV) **“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge (who puts his trust) in him.”** (Proverbs 30:5, ESV) **“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.”** (Nahum 1:7, ESV) **“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”** (Psalm 18:2, ESV)

This is our life beloved. This is the kind of trust, the kind of faith to which we are called as God’s people. The Christian life is a life of faith in God, trust and confidence in his Word and in his mercy offered us in Christ – **and it is also a matter of obedience to God, doing what our Savior says come wind, come weather.** It is not one of those things or the other, it is both or it is nothing! That is what the writer of Hebrews is driving home to us this morning. And like Joshua and these Israelites proved at Jericho, God is worthy of our trust. Unlike men, He never lies and never fails to fulfill His promises. **“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”** (Numbers 23:19, ESV) His plans are perfect, holy, and righteous, and He works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His holy purpose. If we will labor to really know God through His Word, we will see that He is worthy of our trust, and our faith in Him will grow daily. To know Him is to trust Him.

And faith, faith like we see in the story of Joshua, the Israelites and Jericho is so practical, and so needful. Faith is the non-negotiable need of every one of our lives. We cannot live, truly live, without faith in Christ and we must labor to grow more and more in faith. Every

day we need to do what makes for a growing faith, what makes for a life of faith. We must search the Scriptures, pray and really believe that God will give us greater and great faith in Him, that He will give to us a heart longing to be shaped by the Word of God, that God will give to us the mind of Christ, that he will develop in us holiness and obedience. Search the Word, pray and believe that you may be enabled to stand firm in Christ and overcome temptation, believe that secure in Christ, the lure of this world will not overcome you and take your eyes off Christ. Pray and believe, act upon the teachings of the Word of God, so that you will persevere in the faith until Christ Jesus comes, that your homes will abound in grace, that your marriages and your children would be shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ and that you would adorn the gospel. Trust God's Word, pray and believe that this church would stand fast and faithful on the Word, seeking the approval of Christ and not the world. Pray for the lost and believe that God would grant them faith. Pray and believe that they would be persuaded by your words and actions to turn from their sins and follow Christ. Pray and believe for the gospel to sweep through this country again.

Search God's Word, pray and then believe for one another and *with* one another. Trust and believe that your brothers and sisters would not grow weary in well-doing, that God would sustain them, that they may grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust and pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to them and to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, that together you would see the hope of your calling, that you would know his power. Trust and pray that their love and your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that together you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Trust and pray that they and you may be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to together the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Trust and pray, according to God's Word, that the fullness of God in us would overflow into blessing for the nations – that the gospel would go forth from us and the Spirit of God would go before the proclamation of the Word and that Christ would have the reward of His sufferings.

This is the life of faith. ***“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”*** (1 John 5:4, ESV) Beloved, this is what we are called to – powerful, undeniable, durable, lasting faith in the Almighty God. This

is the faith God blesses, the faith God delights to honor. That is how we were made and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ to live. That is the kind of life that I long for, don't you? I know you do.

Let's just be completely honest, ok? What other reasonable choice do we have? Trust in ourselves or in others who are sinful, unpredictable, unreliable, have limited wisdom, and who frequently make bad choices and decisions swayed by emotion? Or trust in the all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful, gracious, merciful, loving God who is for our eternal good and His glory? The choice should be obvious. Again, I'll quote Charles Spurgeon as we close. He said, **I believe that the happiest of all Christians and the truest of Christians are those who never dare to doubt God, but take His Word simply as it stands, and believe it, and ask no questions, just feeling assured that if God has said it, it will be so.**

Let us have a faith like that – individually and corporatel

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