

Hebrews 11:29-34 "The Faith Of Israel, And Those Individuals In Israel"

Last week we left Moses taking the lead in the redemption of Israel as God provided the means to release them from bondage.

HEB 11:28 "By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel."

So, it was through the faith of Moses in accepting the provision of God, as he encouraged all of Israel to do the same, that Moses is the one seen exercising faith on behalf of Israel while they too had to exercise their faith in accepting this provision.

But this morning we move from the faith of Moses alone to the nation of Israel collectively.

HEB 11:29 "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea (That is, Sea of Reeds) as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned."

And yet, once again, the faith of the nation was not a faith which was exercised immediately, it had to be prodded by Moses who stood firm. Israel knew that Pharaoh was now hot on their heels. He had brought his entire army out to bring Israel back or destroy them in the process. An un-crossable sea is in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind them.

EXO 14:11-14 "They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" 13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

This doesn't look like faith on Israel's part, in fact it's more reminiscent of how this first generation of Jews delivered out of Egypt acted in the desert, when they continually grumbled against Moses and God. But our writer is not as concerned at this time with the unbelief on Israel's part, during those times, as he is with

how faith, when practiced, does accomplish God's will to His glory.

That's what this chapter is about: faith in action and what it produces. But, as with any faith which is tested, often times we, like the Israelites, must understand what Moses told them on this side of the Red Sea which is, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

In other words, 'stop panicking and fearing and coming to the kind of conclusions which you can only perceive with earthly eyes, and rest in the Lord, be still and trust He will accomplish His will and be with you in the process.'

And what we find in Israel's case is that the faith of one enabled the entire group to go forward on dry ground. But what this also shows us is that even when, by faith, you leave Egypt and begin moving in the direction God wants you to move in, it doesn't automatically mean that the enemy will leave you alone, and it doesn't mean our faith won't be tested again.

But the assurance we do have is that faith in God will deliver and enable us to go forward with Him, in spite of the trials and testings. The other thing it shows us is that when our faith is strong in the Lord we can encourage others who may be faint of heart at times in their lives.

F.F. Bruce makes the comment: "The Israelites' faith on this occasion consisted in their willingness to go forward at God's word, although it seemed impossible to get across the sea. Moses assured them that their God would act on their behalf, and although they could not see how He would do so, they obeyed."

All of us at times grow weary and become faint in our faith. It's nice to be able to count on the faith of others to encourage us and keep our eyes on our God. This is why it's so important for your faith to be strong, not only for yourself, but for the sake of others as well.

This is what Paul tells us in ROM 15:1-2 "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

We now move 40 years ahead as the nation of Israel is about to enter Canaan, the promised land. The previous generation died in the wilderness because of unbelief. They had come out of Egypt

but their hearts were still in Egypt. And, despite an act of moving forward at the insistence of Moses and the others who believed, they showed their true colors and they were colors of unbelief.

But the remnant, those who saw the promises and were willing to go where God lead, were now receiving the promise. The gateway to the Promised Land was through Jericho.

HEB 11:30 "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."

By this time Moses had died and it is Joshua who is in command and Joshua whose faith leads them forward. The Lord was with Joshua who was a man of faith and he was told by God that He would deliver Jericho into Joshua's hand. The only thing he needed to do was to march around the city for six days, once each day. On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times, at which time God would go before them.

JOS 6:20 "When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city."

We've all heard this account at some time in our lives. And we believe it happened just as God's word says. And yet think how it must have seemed to the people involved in that battle. Joshua was a military man with about 40,000 armed men in this campaign. To a military man it may have seemed foolish to openly walk around a city waiting for the walls to fall down.

Most military strategists would have thought of ways to breach the walls, maybe by digging under them or going over them or battering them down. They might have camped outside waiting to starve them out as they surrounded the city.

But we know that God uses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. F.F. Bruce once again says, "nothing could seem more foolish than for (40,000) grown men to march around a strong fortress for seven days on end, led by seven priests blowing rams horns."

But when God says to do such a thing, it's something we must believe and do by faith. You and I have all sorts of Jericho's in our lives and sometimes we want to dig under them go over them or batter them down, when in fact God wants us to wait on Him as we march around it by faith; not necessarily in a literal sense as with

Joshua, but in the sense that we approach the situation in God's strength according to His will.

Marching around Jericho may seem foolish, but it wasn't, and it wasn't inactivity. The people didn't sit down to take the city. They marched, they went forward even though they weren't going very far. But their faith and obedience saw the hand of the Lord go to work and He gave them the victory.

Paul says in 2CO 10:4-5 "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Joshua's army had to wait 7 long days before they saw God's hand work on their behalf. A.W. Pink notes: "we find it much harder to wait than we do to believe: that is, probably, the weakest spot in our armor, and the point at which we fail most frequently. Let us be more definite and earnest in [pleading] with the Holy Spirit to work in us the spiritual grace of patience. Let us seek grace to lay hold of that word, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (GAL 6:9)

What God did with Joshua and Israel was supernatural in nature. But it is the spiritual, the heavenly, that God desires us to see with eyes of faith. He alone should be the One we see who is able to tear down the walls and enable us to go through in victory. He will do it. We must believe.

We're not finished with Jericho. There were real people who lived behind those walls. One person in particular was a woman who was a prostitute for many years. Before Joshua was commanded to cross over the Jordan he sent spies out to gather intelligence about Jericho.

JOS 2:1 "Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there."

How they got into the city unnoticed, we're not told. But they end up in the company of a prostitute. How they ended up with her, we're not told. But it must be assumed that it is God who allowed

them to enter the city and it is God who directed them to Rahab. His Divine hand was upon the whole campaign.

When Rahab was confronted by these two spies, instead of turning them in she hides them and protects them from the king who found out they were in town. She knew their God was the One true God and that He was with Israel. She also knew that their God gave them the land and was now in the process of delivering this land into their hands.

Because of this knowledge she humbled herself and conceded to protect them because she feared, not so much Israel, but the God of Israel. The faith of Rahab is undeniable. What brought that faith about was an understanding of God and His requirement: faith and obedience. Well, how did Rahab demonstrate faith and obedience since we're told clearly that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God?

What did she hear? Well, this is what we're told. She said to the spies in JOS 2:9-11 ..."I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. 11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

She had heard of the mighty works of God in Israel. She was fully aware of their departure from Egypt, and how the Lord went before them as they destroyed the two kings of the Amorites. But notice what it did to the people of Jericho. "When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

The hearts of the people of Jericho melted and their courage failed because they knew they would have to confront Israel and their God. They knew no one could stand before them because of God. A confrontation was inevitable.

What they had failed to realize is that a confrontation could have been avoided. Knowing they would be destroyed, they need only submit to God and surrender and find life and peace with Israel and her God.

That was the problem with the Amorite kings. They weren't willing to submit to God as He led Israel through the territory of the Amorites.

NUM 21:21-25 "Israel sent messengers to say to Sihon king of the Amorites: 22 "Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway until we have passed through your territory." 23 But Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the desert against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he fought with Israel. 24 Israel, however, put him to the sword and took over his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, but only as far as the Ammonites, because their border was fortified. 25 Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements."

The Amorites would not submit to God as God led His people through their land. Big mistake. Instead of receiving mercy for complying with the Lord, they received judgment for stubborn hearts who wanted to fight with the Lord. They didn't take into consideration who they were dealing with, for they undoubtedly knew of Israel's exodus from Egypt and of the miracles the Lord accomplished on their behalf.

They were well aware of the fact that the entire nation of Israel were slaves. They didn't have a military in Egypt. Prior to Moses they didn't have a leader. They were a weak and beat down people. The Amorites surely knew Israel didn't fight their way out of Egypt like some rebels seeking independence. They walked out because God opened the door and the Amorites knew this.

Pride, stubbornness and the power they possessed as a nation would not allow them to consider humbling themselves before a foreign God, even when that God showed Himself to be the true God with all power.

And now Jericho is confronted with not only the demonstration of Israel's God bringing them out of Egypt, but also the demonstration of how He destroyed the Amorite Kings. They heard of the mighty deeds of God and knew them to be true and still they didn't submit, except for one person; Rahab.

It's one thing to have your heart melted in fear because you know the truth about God, it's quite another thing to turn that fear into a humbleness in seeking the mercy of God as you embrace Him by

faith, and in obedience do that which pleases Him. In the case of Rahab, her fear of God was greater than her fear of an earthly king.

Her fear understood that God is Almighty and deserving full allegiance. Because of that, by faith in God, she accommodated the two spies and hid them. But she knew something else about God. She knew He was merciful and because of that she didn't stop with just protecting the spies, she asked for mercy herself.

JOS 2:12-14 "Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death." ¹⁴ "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."

She had heard of the One true God and came to the conclusion that you can't fight God and that His judgment is final. This is where the world is today. People may deny it or they may simply avoid thinking about it, but God has shown Himself to us in His creation and through His word and ultimately through His Son who came into this world for us.

But men do not fear God and they fight Him to the grave where judgment is sure. And yet instead of looking for a confrontation, men need only submit to their God and by faith come to Him for mercy. The two spies were God's representatives who brought Rahab the good news that submission to God brings the reward of life.

You and I are God's representatives sent out into this world to not only warn of impending judgment, but of the good news that there is life in Christ as they quit fighting God and surrender to Him and His love and mercy.

Rahab not only was spared but she actually became a part of Israel. She was identified with the covenant people of God. This too shows us that salvation is for all who would come, Jew or Gentile. Rahab was certainly a Gentile and yet she was shown mercy by God as she placed her faith in the One true God and showed her faith as she obeyed the Lord by protecting the spies.

Rahab is also the one who ends up marrying a man by the name of Salmon, a Jew.

MAT 1:5-6 "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David..... "

This woman, who was a former prostitute, is blessed by God for her faith and obedience. She is directly used by God to be the great-great grandmother of King David. It is through King David's line that the Messiah is born into this world.

Yes, God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, but He uses us who, by faith, will follow Him and place our trust in eternal things not seen, which the world deems foolish, but are in fact those very things God is using to bring us life and peace with Himself in Christ.

HEB 11:31 "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." (Or unbelieving)

All of Jericho could have been saved. They wouldn't believe that God was who He said He was and they perished. There's a lesson there for all mankind.

HEB 11:32-34 "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies."

As we've looked extensively at the people of faith in this chapter and have witnessed their faith we might ask the same question: "What more shall I say?" There isn't enough time to go into all of the people who turned to God and His promises by faith. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel and the prophets.

We could spend a great deal of time going into just these 6 named people and the rest of the prophets. And though we would be blessed by their lives of faith, there really isn't anything new we could add as to what the substance of faith is, which is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Faith will always be accompanied by action. Faith does not lie dormant and this is the point of Hebrews eleven. If we say we have faith then that faith will act in accordance with God's will.

To say we have faith and not walk in that faith shows there is something terribly wrong.

We'll just touch on the way faith worked itself out in the life of some of these people mentioned in verses 33-34 and see if we can glean anything for our lives.

HEB 11:33 "who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,"

Here we see how these men mentioned in verse 32 accomplished great things for God as they placed their faith in Him alone. Israel was never a super-power when it came to war and yet they did conquer Kingdoms. You and I have no inherent power to contend with such forces in this world but we do have God and a promise that He is our strength and our armor and that the battle belongs to Him.

Paul tells us in EPH 6:13 "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

Our text in Hebrews speaks of shutting the mouths of lions. Undoubtedly Daniel came to our writers mind. But we know it wasn't Daniel who shut the lion's mouth, but God. And yet Daniel's faith trusted God to do just that. But for you and me we too have a God who can take the bite out of another lions mouth who roams around seeking someone to devour.

This is why Peter writes in 1PE 5:8-9 "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

Verse 34 of our text speaks of how the saints of old, by faith, quenched the fury of the flames. Shadrach, Meshac and Abednego knew what this meant first hand. They trusted God could deliver them and yet they were willing to be burned alive rather than submit to the King of Babylon's ungodly request that they would bow down to an idol of the King.

They were given the strength and the ability, by faith, to walk the path the Lord put before them. We know God delivered them. But what about you and me? What about the flaming arrows the enemy sends our way? Can we extinguish them?

In speaking of the armor God gives us for this battle He tells us in EPH 6:16 "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

Are we defenseless in this world? When we look at the Church at large we've gotta wonder. The attacks of Satan seem to go unchallenged. His flaming arrows full of deceit, false teaching, are all part of the attack and yet instead of raising a standard of God's truth, many in the Church have adopted these lies.

God's shield of faith will enable us to discern and to fight the good fight as we go out in this world with the truth to set the captives free. Like the saints of old our weakness is turned to strength, and we've become powerful in battle and can rout foreign armies.

But, only by faith in our Captain and Master can we go out and do battle as we walk in His strength.

EPH 6:10 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

We have been called by God to rout the enemy, not to passively stand and be squashed like bugs.

I like the story of Jonathan who went up against the Philistines army outpost.

1SA 14:12-15 "The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson." So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel." 13 Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. 14 In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre. 15 Then panic struck the whole army - those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties - and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God."

We don't fight with earthly weapons. But our boldness should not be any less as we do battle in this spiritual fight. God has given us the victory and though we should certainly respect our enemy we need not fear him. He was vanquished at the cross. Death was defeated when our Lord rose bodily from the grave and He sends us out into this world to be conquering soldiers of Christ. And the cause we fight for is for the souls of people as we bring them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's all by faith as we represent our Lord in obedience to His will. And as we do He will be glorified and we will be blessed. Look at the saints of old. They weren't much different from you and me, and yet they didn't look back. They continued to move forward because they saw with eyes of faith a faithful God who loved them.

EPH 6:13-18 "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

This is how we do battle. This is how we honor God. Stand firm in your faith. And as Paul says in GAL 6:9-10 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Fight the good fight in the power of the Spirit and by faith in our Almighty God!