

Hebrews

Faith to Conquer and Convert

Hebrews 11:30-31

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INTRODUCTION:

All Stand and Read Scripture.

Hebrews 11:30-31 (NASB95)

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

Prayer

As we live in this world of sin we are often faced with great opportunities that seem impossible to accomplish. Are you facing opportunities today that you consider insurmountable?

Some have trusted Christ as Savior, but have this seemingly insurmountable opportunity of some besetting sin that keeps bringing them down. They promise God that they will not do it again, only to repeatedly fail. Some are engulfed by problems in their marriages, or with their kids. They do not see any viable solutions. Some struggle daily with serious health problems or personal problems. Some face problems at work. **Others wish they had work to have problems with!** They struggle to make ends meet. Some have drifted into worldliness and spiritual apathy and they do not even realize that they have a problem.

As a leader in Israel after Moses' death, Joshua had a pile of seemingly insurmountable opportunities. He had to lead this fledgling nation of refugee slaves, who had wandered in the wilderness for forty years, across the Jordan River, and into the promised land that happened to be filled with evil, violent giants. The first seemingly insurmountable opportunity was to conquer the fortified city of Jericho. God gave Joshua the plan for victory. And **by faith**, the walls of that fortress crumbled.

Meanwhile, inside the city, a prostitute had a huge **disguised opportunity**. She had heard of how God had miraculously delivered this people from Egypt 40 years before. She heard how they had defeated two powerful kings across the river. She knew that her city was next and that she and all of her family would perish, unless somehow the God of the Jews—the God of heaven and earth—intervened on their behalf. Then the impossible happened—two spies from that feared people came to lodge with her. She hid them from the authorities and they promised to spare her family and her, if she followed their directions. **By faith**, she and her family did not perish when her city was destroyed.

BODY:

These two stories that took place during the conquest of Jericho illustrate how God conquers our powerful enemies by faith and converts hopeless sinners by faith.

I. God Conquers Our Powerful Enemies by Faith.

Hebrews 11:30 (NASB95)

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

Faith is not some magical force. Rather, faith links us with the unseen God, who spoke the universe into existence. Faith is the channel through which God's blessings flow to us.

Jericho was the first obstacle of many that Joshua and the army of Israel faced in conquering Canaan, which God had promised to their forefather, Abraham. As he was pondering how to take this walled city, the Lord appeared to Joshua in human form as the captain of the Lord's army and revealed to him the plan for victory.

Joshua 6:1-5 (NASB95)

⁶ Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. ² The Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king *and* the valiant warriors. ³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. ⁴ Also 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. ⁵ 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."

There are many lessons in that story, but I will only focus on five:

A. Salvation Brings Us into Conflict with Powerful Enemies.

We saw this with Israel and Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. But it compels us to repeat the story. Salvation does not insulate you from huge problems. Rather, it often brings you into conflict with problems that did not even bother you before you were saved. Before you were saved, selfishness, pride, greed, lust, and many other sins did not trouble you. You may even have thought that some of them were virtues! But then you turned your life over to Christ and realized that there are many fortified cities that must be conquered, and many of them are entrenched in your heart!

Not only do you face these enemies within, but now you face enemies from without that previously caused you no problems. Many times family members do not like your newfound faith, because it threatens their favorite sins. Bosses do not like the fact that you will not help them cheat to make a profit. Former friends malign you because you will not join them at their corrupt parties.

1 Peter 4:3-5 (NASB95)

³ For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; ⁵ but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

B. God's Way of Victory Over These Enemies Reveals His Power and Our Weakness.

Marching your army around a walled city for seven days while blowing trumpets did **not** seem to be a sensible plan for victory! It must have seemed silly to many in Israel and to everyone inside Jericho. If Joshua had held meetings with his top commanders, none of them would have suggested this plan. One might have argued for a direct assault, with siege ramps and battering rams to overpower the city. Another may have suggested waiting it out until the city was starved into submission. But no one would have suggested doing what God commanded Joshua to do.

Why did God choose this strange approach? I think that He wanted to teach Israel a major lesson at the outset of their conquest of Canaan: **Victory over powerful enemies comes when we do not trust in ourselves, but trust totally in the Lord.** The repeated trips around Jericho served to drive home the lesson, "You cannot conquer this city in your strength. You must trust in My power."

Often our problem is **not** that we are **too weak**, but that we think that we are strong in ourselves. Because we are so prone to pride, if God granted us victory, we would take at least some of the credit for ourselves. So God's plan for victory humbles our pride by focusing attention on His power and our weakness.

You see this in the story of Gideon and his army trying to conquer the hordes of Midianites in Judges, chapters 6 and 7. He rallied an army of 32,000 men against 135,000 enemy troops, but God told Gideon that he had **too many** soldiers, not too few. If they won, they would boast in their victory. So, Gideon sent home 22,000 warriors who were afraid. But God said, "You still have too many men." So Gideon weeded them out until he was left with only 300 soldiers. Finally, being **weak** enough, God could grant them victory and they would give Him the glory!

Paul entreated the Lord to take away his thorn in the flesh, but the Lord told him that His power is perfected in weakness. Paul testified, "**when I am weak, then I am strong**".

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NASB95)

⁷ Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

So God's means for victory always involves faith, because faith acknowledges our inability and God's total ability. Faith humbles our pride and exalts God's glory. That is why the scriptures tell us that all things will work together for those who love Him.

Romans 8:26-28 (NASB95)

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts (God) knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He (the Holy Spirit) intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*.

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

C. Faith Must Unconditionally Obey God.

Faith and obedience are inseparable, just as unbelief and disobedience go together. Genuine faith **always** obeys God. Israel could have said, “That is an interesting plan, Joshua, and we believe that God could do it that way. But we are going to try a more sensible approach.” That would have been faithless and disobedient.

To obey God, they had to march silently around the city once a day for six days. The seventh day, when Joshua told them to march around it seven times, there may have been some groans. Each time around the city took between 30 minutes to an hour (depending on whom you read), so the **thirteen** times could have taken up to 13 hours. By the seventh day, some could have been grumbling under their breath, “This is dumb. Nothing has happened yet.” But if any said that, it is not recorded. They obeyed what God had commanded. When they shouted, the walls miraculously came crashing down.

To obey God, we must know what His Word says about our situation. God spoke audibly to Joshua. While I often wish that He would do that today, such direct communication from God is very rare.

How does God speak to us?

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NASB95)

¹ God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

While sometimes it is difficult to know how the Bible applies to our specific problem, it is obvious that we cannot obey His Word unless we know what it says and how it applies. Yet I have often seen Christians who are disobeying the clear commands of God’s Word and they wonder why God is not blessing their lives!

Knowledge of God’s Word must be followed by obedience, no matter how much it goes against conventional wisdom. As Isaiah taught us...

Isaiah 55:8 (NAS95)

⁸ “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.

When Moses lead two million refugee slaves down to the Red Sea, with no way of escape from Pharaoh’s army, it did not meet with conventional wisdom. But he did it in direct obedience to God. Taking the same group out into the barren wilderness seemed like a sure formula for major disaster, but God had commanded him, and Moses obeyed.

Conventional wisdom says, “You can’t get ahead in your business unless you cheat your customers and lie to the IRS.” Faith obeys God, even if it leads to financial loss. Conventional wisdom says, “Everyone sleeps together before marriage. How else will you know if you are compatible? Besides, God will forgive.” Faith says, “I am going to obey God. I will not compromise, even if other Christians are doing it.” Faith obeys God.

D. Faith Must Wait Upon God.

You may wonder why God made such an ordeal out of conquering Jericho. He could have just said, “March around Jericho once, blow the trumpet and shout! The walls will fall down”. Every night they marched back to camp thinking, “We did not accomplish anything today!” Each day tested their faith, and each day that victory was delayed, the test increased in intensity. Perhaps they heard jeers from those on the wall who were watching this futile daily parade. The jeers tempted them to take action to silence these scoffers. But they had to wait for God’s timing. Finally,

E. Faith Must Wait on God Expectantly.

They believed that God was going to act when they obeyed. There is no record that Joshua told them in advance what was going to happen. They just understood that Joshua knew what God had commanded, and they obeyed. But when he told them to shout, they shouted **expectantly**, and God caused these impenetrable walls to crumble. Even though faith waits, faith waits expectantly, knowing that God **will** act in His power in His time.

But while Israel was marching around Jericho that week, another drama was taking place inside one house in the city. A prostitute named Rahab was crowded into her house with her extended family, waiting anxiously to see what would happen. Her story shows us that...

II. God Converts Hopeless Sinners by Faith.

Hebrews 11:31 (NASB95)

31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

Rahab’s story is a wonderful exhibit of God’s grace! She seemed to be an unlikely candidate for salvation. From a Jewish perspective, Rahab had three strikes against her: she was a woman, she was a Canaanite, and she was a prostitute.

Even though Rahab was an unlikely candidate for salvation, God’s grace had reached down to her. The fact that she is called “**Rahab, the harlot**,” even after her conversion, underscores God’s abundant grace toward sinners. The spies did not know when they went there that God had a mission for them besides spying, but He did. Sometimes we go somewhere on some errand, but God has another purpose, to use us to bring salvation to someone whom we would consider an unlikely candidate.

Rahab could have complained that God was unfair to judge her city. She no doubt lost many friends in the conquest. But instead, she knew that she deserved death for her evil lifestyle. Although the entire city trembled with fear of the impending attack, their fear did not lead to repentance and faith. Rahab’s fear led her to turn from her sin and to believe in God. By faith, she “**did not perish along with those who were disobedient**”.

Many think, probably correctly, that Rahab had come to faith in God *before* the spies arrived at her house. When God providentially brought the spies to her house, she saw it as the means of deliverance for herself and for her family. Although she did not understand much theology, she had enough faith in the one true God to save her. Her past life of sin did not disqualify her from salvation. God delights to save notorious sinners for His glory!

Rahab’s faith separated her from her disobedient city dwellers. They had heard of God’s power, but they refused to submit to Him. They erroneously thought that their walled city

would protect them. To be saved, Rahab had to break away from her people, her culture, and her source of income. This is never easy to do. She may have wrestled with her decision, but by faith she made the break.

It is still true today: saving faith means making a distinct break from this evil world, so that we often stand out as weird in the world's eyes.

Genuine faith always results in good works. Her faith led her to hide the spies and send them away secretly, even though it put her life at great risk. She had to obey the precise instructions that the spies gave her, to put the scarlet rope in her window and to have all of her family inside the house with her, in order for them to be saved. It may have seemed silly for her and her family to watch Israel marching silently around the city for 13 times. They may have been tempted to join others on the wall shouting insults to the troops below. But they obeyed and they were saved.

We do not know for certain that her family was saved spiritually, although I think it is probable. But we do know that they were saved physically from destruction at Jericho, and they became a part of the people of God.

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ includes the surprising fact that Rahab married a Jewish man, Salmon, and they had a son, Boaz, who married Ruth. Their son, Obed, was the father of Jesse, the father of David. So Rahab, the harlot, became an ancestor of Jesus Christ! What a great testimony of God's abundant grace!

Prostitution is never glamorous. It is ugly. Men **pay** to use a woman's body, with no regard for her as a person. Prostitutes are never respected for what they do. When their bodies become too old to be attractive, they are out of work, lonely, and unloved.

But God reclaims the lives of the worst of sinners who turn to Him in repentance and faith. Rahab married and became a mother and grandmother. She became a partaker of all of Israel's spiritual privileges, and even became genealogically linked to Christ Himself! Any life outside of Christ is futile and headed for eternal destruction. Any life that God saves by His grace through faith becomes fruitful and headed for eternal glory.

CONCLUSION:

Jericho is a picture of this evil world, opposed to God. Either you are, by faith, on God's side, with some "Jericho's" in your life that you need to conquer. Or, you are comfortably living in Jericho, thinking that you are safe. But you are headed for destruction, whether you know it or not.

Whichever describes your situation, the key to victory is **faith**. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His death on the cross in your place will deliver you from the coming destruction. If you are in God's camp, faith in His mighty power will give you victory over the intimidating enemies that threaten to destroy you. What great opportunities, disguised as seemingly insurmountable problems, do you face? God has whatever resources you need to overcome them.

Trust Him!

What a Day That Will Be!