

Faith: Rahab

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[0 : 00] Bearing in mind the reading that we share together from Joshua, and we'll refer to that at various points, can you turn with me to Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11 and we're going to read verses 29 and 30.

Or sorry 13 31. It's on page 1210. Hebrews chapter 11. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after the people had marched around them for seven days.

And by faith the prostitute Rahab because she welcomed the spies was not killed with those who were disobedient or were unbelieving.

Now just want to, we've been looking at faith over this weekend last evening this morning and also this evening we're going to look at a couple of elements of faith and do so from this passage.

And I'm not going to spend any time going over the story of the walls of Jericho falling down. I'm going to focus more on the principles and on the practical implications of that for New Testament believers many, many centuries after what had happened.

[1 : 19] And it's not dissimilar to what we were looking at this morning in the sense that we know very little about Rahab. We know very little about her faith and we are left to presume quite a great deal or imply from the light of other scripture more about her faith.

But I would just want, I just briefly want to mention two things from these verses with regard to our faith and with regard to living a life of faith for ourselves as individuals and also for ourselves as a church.

The first thing I want to say is, and unashamedly I'm going to spiritualise, okay? I'm going to spiritualise the story of Jericho because I think it's entirely legitimate to do so.

It's absolutely factual and literal, the account of the walls of Jericho being knocked down miraculously in order for God's people to continue to enter Canaan and to enter the promised land. But I want to apply that spiritually to ourselves and remind ourselves that as we live by faith as individuals and as a church, we will find that opposition will be knocked down, that barriers will be broken down.

[2 : 55] You know the Jericho walls, the well-known story too isn't it? It's the story we sing as children about the walls of Jericho coming tumbling down. And it's a very plain story, a very literal story.

It's a very miraculous story, it's a very amazing story, a very interesting story. I don't have time to look at that story this evening. But there's a faith message from the story for our lives as the writer to Hebrews looks through the Acts of Faith in the Old Testament and applies them to the church. And as we saw this morning, this chapter sandwiched in a sense in encouragement for the church of God to persevere, to keep going, to be people of faith.

It's easy to give up, it's easy to struggle. So he encourages the church to keep going and he uses these examples of people of faith to encourage the New Testament believers to keep going.

And that is, therefore, in the light of all these great witnesses, fix our eyes on Jesus and keep on going, not grow weary and not lose heart.

[4 : 15] And the reality is that that is what is often the way for us. We often lose heart, we often grow weary as Christians, we struggle. And so we find that the Bible constantly points us to Jesus and to the power of God to remind us to keep going and to persevere and not to give up.

So there's a very clear faith message from this Old Testament story, by faith. The walls of Jericho fell down after the people had marched around them seven days.

It was God's work. It was because they trusted in God's way. It's because they listened to what God had said and it was the way that they obeyed what God said that allowed them to see this unbelievable fortress being broken down in front of them in an absolutely miraculous way.

The barriers to their promise being fulfilled of entering the promised land was crumbling before them. And that is always the story of the Bible.

And it's the story of people of faith throughout the Bible from beginning to end, is that when they do things God's way, when they follow God's path, then they see opposition crumbling and barriers being broken down.

[5 : 38] It's the story of Joshua, it's the story of Gideon, it's the story of Moses, it's the story of Elijah, it's the story of David, and Goliath, it's the story of the prophets, it's the story of Jesus, it's the story of Paul.

Of insurmountable odds being overcome because people lived by faith and trusted in what God said to them. And that's encouraging for us as we take a very old testament example and apply it to our own lives.

Because in life as a Christian we are constantly being faced with what we may regard as insurmountable barriers, difficulties.

It struggles that are a test of our faith and our belief system. And we find constantly that we're being challenged in our faith and there are things that just seem so great for us, so appalling to us that we can't overcome them ourselves and we're struggling whether it is in our life, in our health, in our family, in our relationships, in our work, it may be in our hearts, it may be a way of living or a sin in our hearts that we simply can't overcome.

It may be being Christian in a society or in a workplace where nobody else is interested and nobody listens and the gospel progress seems to have hit this invisibly great and blank wall and there is no overcoming it.

[7 : 14] I feel it as a minister, I feel it in the church, I feel it in the society in which I live, I feel it with my friends. Why will they, how will they become Christians?

How is it that they will overcome a life of unbelief and secularism to become Christians? How will they overcome the opposition that they feel comes from science and from secular society and from the wealth that they're pursuing and from the comfort of their lives to be Christians?

Many insurmountable barriers and maybe we struggle with other barriers that are a challenge to our faith and that make us want to give up our faith and give up on following Jesus Christ.

With encouragement is as people of faith is to use God's strategy in the same way that the Israelites used God's strategy and that rehab also used.

We use God's strategy and that is always a different strategy to the world. It's a faith strategy. We need to go back to that as Christians and as a church all the time.

[8 : 28] What is the strategy of living by faith? There's many indications and teachings in the Bible that remind us of the way of faith.

2nd A.F.4.6, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit says the Lord. Saint Corinthians 10, the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, we have divine power to demolish strongholds. Ephesians 6, finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power put on the full armour of God so that may take your stand against the devil's schemes.

We find and we know and we recognise that there are principles of living by faith that enable us to overcome the barriers we face in life. And the first is prayer.

We need to be a praying people. It's always at the core of the armory of the person of faith. We need to be believing. We need to be taking our troubles and our barriers and our oppositions and our walls and our struggles.

[9 : 36] We need to be taking them to God in relentless, restless prayer. You need to be a person of prayer if you are a person of faith. You need to be talking with God.

You need to be conversing with God. You need to be taking your problems and your concerns and the barriers and the oppositions and the unbelief and the struggles that you face in life.

Take them to the living God in prayer. Can't stress enough the importance of a living, vibrant prayer life as Christians in this life of faith, in this way of miracle.

If we are to knock down opposition, we find that miracles happen as we commit to God in prayer and as we also spiritually battle in the way that the Old Testament church very often physically we're battling for God and for His cause.

We are to fight spiritually wearing the armor of God, living the life of obedience, following Him in our lives. And that really is the key to breaking down the barriers to growth and to grace and to faith in

our lives is by living for Him, very simple, living for Him, wearing the armor of God, knowing His way and being in relationship with Him.

[11 : 04] When God responds, there is never one prayer that you have offered that God has not answered or will not answer or has already answered.

Nothing that you bring before Him is deemed unworthy of a response. He will always respond. He will always answer. It may not be in the way that we expect, it may be in a far more glorious way than we could ever imagine. And if you are a person of faith, you will have experienced that in your life.

You will have experienced God at work in ways that you could never have imagined, walls being broken down in ways you could never have anticipated as you have helplessly gone to Him in prayer and lived that life of armor wearing spiritually for Him.

And that is also significant for us as a church as we strategize. There's lots of strategy in the church today.

[12 : 12] I struggle with all, but we have God's strategy which is significant for us as a church.

As we seek to influence this city and our communities, as Martin seeks to influence his city with his particular emphasis that we share a similar strategy.

As a church it is that we pray and that we obey. As that we wear the armor. It's important that we recognize that, the root of our strategy for growth as a church.

We pray and we pray together and we pray fervently and we pray for all the issues that are opposing us in our growth and development as a church and also we fight by wearing his armor together, that we protect one another, that we surround ourselves in God's Word, that we live the life of grace and that we are committed wholeheartedly to Him as individuals.

When one drops the guard, it affects all of us and the church is weakened.

[13 : 35] When one cares less about the reputation of another in the church, all of us are weakened. When one speaks bitterly of another, all are weakened.

When we take our eyes off Christ and focus on secondary or other issues, all are weakened. It is all about recognizing and working together and in so doing the opposition to the Gospel crumbles.

We have many things that are barriers to the Gospel here and we have many concerns to see more people brought into the Kingdom.

That's good. There is much opposition. Let us be people who use the strategy of faith and see these walls coming down that we see miracles happening.

There is only one other thing I want to say briefly. When we are a faithful people, particularly I think, but also faithful individuals, but when we are a faithful people, God uses us to raise up other believers.

[14 : 51] By faith, the walls of Jericho fell after the people had marched around them for seven days. By faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Rahab came to faith and we know very little about her coming to faith, but she came to faith through ultimately the testimony of God's people, which had instilled fear into her own people, but instilled faith in her and she allied herself with the Lord God.

Isn't it great who God raised up as a believer? The Old Testament is full of these surprises. An influential person who is well used in the outworking of God's purposes, a prostitute, potentially an innkeeper, an enemy of Israel.

She had no church, she had no Bible, she knew no fellowship, but with the little knowledge she had, she trusted in what she had heard about God and used every scrap of that knowledge to put her faith in Him.

We have no real idea of the level of faith she had, the level of understanding, but she is clearly in Scripture regarded as a woman of faith, a woman who believed and a woman who becomes, isn't it beautiful, part of the genealogy of Christ.

[16 : 43] She has that significance within God's purpose and God's plan. It was the reputation of a people who were willing to trust God and follow God and see God do miraculous things that brought her to a living faith.

Immediately God put her to the test and God asked her to put in her lot with God's people to go against her family, but to go against her background, her upbringing, her city and her people to resist counter loyalties and to know a great reward.

It's really an act of obedience that is spoken of, work that is spoken of. If you look up James chapter 2, verse 25, she's referred to there as well, page 1214.

James is that great and a contentious book in the New Testament that some of the great readers of the past struggled with because it seemed to emphasise works as opposed to faith, but it doesn't. It's simply reminding us what we were looking at this morning, that faith without works is dead. It's recognising that where there's faith there will be works in response to God.

[18:12] In the same way, verse 25, was not even rehabbed, the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

We have that spirit filled conclusion of the life of rehab that she was righteous, that she was someone who depended on God, who recognised that she was a sinner, who was dependent on the salvation of God and who put that faith that she had into practice and it was considered as faith in her heart and in her life.

And as we follow Jesus Christ and as we serve Jesus Christ and as we witness for Jesus Christ and as we are reputed to be believers in Christ and His way, then we need to remind ourselves that God will work through us to raise up believers and He'll raise up believers that we least expect. Don't say of anyone, I don't think they'll ever believe. They'll never come to faith. She was a prostitute, she wasn't of God's people, she was an enemy.

She came of faith. Don't make that judgment call on other people's lives. Let God break down the barriers, let God do the impossible and may it be that as we serve Him and as we are people of faith, as we are a church of faith, as we are a community of faith, I think what Martin was saying was very significant about not just doing the work himself but wanting to engage his community of believers in that work.

[20:09] So that's what our model has been, has it not? Not just that we go out as lone rangers with the gospel and share that truth on our own and fight the battle for Jesus Christ but that we do it as a people and as we work together as a people and as we share our lives together as a people and as we let people into our lives to see our Christian community and begin to understand the Christ who is reputed among us that then we will see conversions as we pray and as we wear the armour of God together.

And when He works, don't expect neat, ordered, knowledgeable rows of people who will just nod their heads and come to church and look good and come to the prayer meeting and go home and everything will be balanced and ordinary in their lives because it will be messy as God does His work of transformation and healing and recovery in people's lives.

It's a long time since we've seen conversions in this church and we need to set up and take note of why, long time.

It's out of the ordinary when it happens. I think it should be happening regularly. And we needn't blame God and we needn't blame the society we live in.

We needn't blame ourselves but we do need to look at ourselves and look at our lives of faith as individuals and as a community because He's always wanting us to take up the challenge of putting our faith into practice just as He did with Rahab right away so we confess Him and we serve Him with simple obedience individually and together, wholehearted, involved commitment and obedience to Him.

[22:25] Please don't feel that the prayer life of the church is something you can't engage in, please don't think that the life of obedience that is required of Christ in gratitude and in response to His work is something that doesn't apply to you in your life.

May it be that you recognize your part and recognize your gratitude by living the life of faith His way. And in so doing there will be for us, I believe, great reward. Esther's a great example. Rahab's a great example of what one ordinary person, in these cases one ordinary woman, can do for the kingdom.

And we are all just ordinary people and yet there's no saying what we can do for Christ in His kingdom when we live by faith. You have so many more influences and so many more opportunities in your lives than the minister has in his at one level.

You're surrounded by a harvest field. May it be that you recognize the impossibility of sharing your faith and yet following God's strategy of prayer and obedience and obedient loving service and see from that that God will raise up believers.

[24 : 00] And may that be what we enjoy and what we experience in our community as a church and in our own Christian lives as individuals. That's where our heads in prayer.

Lord God we ask and pray that you would help us to understand the way of faith. That it is very counter cultural, that it demands of us discipleship, that we follow God's ways.

So often we are frustrated. So often we mimic the world's strategies of growth, be it personal growth or church growth.

We externalize everything and we do things in a humanly wise way. But we often forget God's strategy of personal relationship, of prayerful childlike trust, of wearing, donning the armor of God and all that's involved in that, of knowing what that means and knowing what that is in living a life of faith and having the word of God and recognizing the power of prayer and knowing His way and His righteousness and His truth in our lives.

So it allows us to be people who see insurmountable barriers of personal sin or insecurity or brokenness or instability being dealt with by the living God.

[25 : 54] May we know wholeness and healing and forgiveness and hope. May we see great barriers of opposition breaking down in our society among our friends who some may be atheist, some may be bitter and angry, some may be have many reasons for rejecting the Gospel who seems so hard.

We may face our own battles as well with regard to these things but enable us to follow you and live by faith and so may we see many believers being raised up through our life and testimony through our witness.

We know this is your day, this is your kingdom, this is the time of gathering in and we pray that many in this city will be a witness to the new thing that you have promised and that we will see our churches full of people turning to the living God and believing in the good news and being transformed for eternity.

So help us God we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.