

# Faith that Looks to God's Power

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm going to read from God's word now. We're going to read from Hebrews chapter 11, verses 29 to 31.! Just a short reading tonight.

This is God's holy word. By faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down after they'd been encircled for seven days.

By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. Amen. This is God's word. As Chris mentioned at the beginning of the service, we're moving towards the end of the series in Hebrews chapter 11. Next week, God willing, Chris will look at the final verses of the chapter, and then the week after, God willing, I will look at the conclusion, which really is to be found in Hebrews 12 and the first couple of verses there.

And as we've made our way through this very famous chapter of the Bible, I think one of the recurring themes about living the life of faith is that it involves seeing or apprehending that which is invisible.

[ 1 : 22 ] Faith is the conviction of things not yet seen. Noah was warned by God about events unseen.

Moses endured as seeing him who is invisible. And the author of Hebrews wants his readers to live their lives with their eyes, with the eyes of faith fixed upon the invisible God.

He wants them to see that city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. He wants them to be looking forward to that promised reward that is theirs in Jesus Christ, but still yet to be realized.

And this chapter, as we've seen, is all about traveling the way of faith. And according to our writer, faith is about looking beyond the limited horizons of this life to the living God.

Many years ago, the Christian writer A.W. Tozer wrote these words. He said, In other words, for the Christian, faith is focused on God.

[ 2 : 59 ] He is the great object of our faith and trust, and we must not lose sight of Him. And so, as we make our way around this portrait gallery of faith, our author wants to draw our attention really to two key events involving the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan.

And now, why is he doing that? He wants us to get God in focus. He wants us to be looking away from ourselves. He wants us to see in these great events the God whose power is made known amidst human weakness and frailty.

These Hebrew Christians knew a great deal about human weakness and frailty. And our writer is trying to get them to look to God and to the God of power and majesty.

So, what do we see of God in these verses before us tonight? Three verses, so it should be a short sermon. Well, maybe not.

We'll see. What do we see of God in these verses? Let me highlight three things. Verse 29, Faith looks or sees the God of keeping power.

[ 4 : 20 ] Faith looks to the God of keeping power. By faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

So, the reference here in verse 29 is back to the destruction of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, a passage we find in the book of Exodus and chapter 14.

The people had fled from Egypt under Moses' leadership, but Pharaoh, who had allowed them to leave, changed his mind and sent out his army to pursue them and to bring them back.

And in one sense, it is a strange illustration of faith because the Red Sea on the one side, the Egyptian army coming up on the other, when you read Exodus 14, it's not clear that the people of

God demonstrate great confidence in God.

In fact, in Exodus 14, we're told that they were not full of faith, but they were full of fear. So, in Exodus 14, verse 10, and following, you read these words. When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them.

[ 5 : 35 ] They feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?

What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians. For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

Moses said to the people, Fear not. Stand firm. See the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.

The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. The people are terrified. They are grumbling. They are complaining to Moses.

And in turn, Moses tells them not to fear, but rather to stand firm. He reminds them that the Lord will fight for them. And that they, well, in colloquial terms, they should just shut up.

[ 6 : 46 ] Stop their complaining. So, in a sense, it's quite an unusual demonstration of faith, isn't it? People of Israel backed into a corner, almost left with no other option than to trust God.

Only realistic option was to do as the Lord commanded them. So, it may not have been great faith that they demonstrated, but it was faith.

It was a weak faith in a strong and powerful God. It's by faith that they passed through the Red Sea, and the Egyptian army was swallowed up and destroyed after them.

And Exodus 14 really is a passage all about the power of God to deliver His people, to accomplish His purposes. The power of God over His creation, and the power of God over His enemies.

Exodus 14, 30 and 31, we read, Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians. And Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians.

[ 7 : 57 ] So, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord, and in His servant, Moses. That's a passage, of course, that's referred to right throughout the Old Testament.

Isaiah 63, the prophet there speaks of this as an event that brings honor and glory to God's name, a demonstration of God's sovereign power over all other gods and deities.

Isaiah 63, 11, Then He remembered the days of old of Moses and His people. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put in the midst of them His Holy Spirit?

Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name who led them through the depths.

So, this event is a demonstration of God's great power. But it's not to be understood as a kind of spectacular floor show.

[ 9 : 04 ] The context here is very important. Pharaoh regretted his decision to let the Hebrew slaves go. He wanted them back. And what was happening here in this event was a kind of contest about ownership.

Who had the right to claim ownership of Israel? This genocidal king who'd enslaved them for years, who had long been their master, or their divine king, Yahweh, who had come to Egypt to claim, redeem, and deliver them?

It's the future of Israel. It kind of hangs on that question. Who did they belong to? Did they belong to Pharaoh, or did they belong to Yahweh?

And that question of ownership that we see here is still a pertinent one for us today. To whom do we belong?

Who has the claim over your life? Who are you serving? Who are you following? Who are you worshipping? Yourself? The gods of this present age?

[ 10 : 14 ] The prince and ruler of this world? Or the one who is the God of keeping power? The one who has sent His only begotten Son into this world to claim you for Himself?

Question one of the Heidelberg Catechism famously asks the question, what is your only comfort in life and death? And the answer it gives begins with these words, that I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins and redeemed me from all the power of the devil

and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head. You know, sometimes in the Christian life we can wonder, are we ever going to make it? I think the Hebrew Christians to whom our author was writing were struggling with that kind of issue. Sometimes we doubt we can keep it going. Have we got what it takes to endure? We're weak, we're fragile human beings. How can we make it to heaven? There's sin within, there's evil without. And the answer of the Bible is that God will keep us by His own power. He will guard us and keep us. He will preserve us because we are His.

[ 11 : 53 ] We belong to Him. Remember what Paul says to the Philippians in Philippians chapter 1 verse 6, I'm sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

By His mighty power, God keeps His people. And He does this through faith. He guards and keeps us through faith, not apart from faith.

faith. And so, we must go on believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. This is why this letter has been written. God's power keeps us in Christ.

And we must be confident and assured of that power that will keep us and preserve us for heaven. There's an old hymn, has the verse, He will keep me till the river rolls its waters at my feet. Then He'll bear me safely over all my joys in Him complete. He will not let us pass out of His ownership.

[ 12 : 59 ] He will keep us. He will keep us in life. He will keep us in death. Because He has redeemed us by the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb that has now been raised and exalted and given the name above every name, declared the Son of God in power through His resurrection from the dead.

Remember Isaiah's words, Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. And the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba, in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my eyes and honored. And I love you. Faith looks to the God of keeping power.

[ 14 : 06 ] Brings me to the second thing here. And that is that faith looks to the God of transforming power. In verse 30. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

So, the second event alluded to in these verses relates not to the Exodus, but to the conquest of Canaan. And in particular, to the fall of Jericho, which is detailed for us in Joshua chapter 6. Jericho was a highly fortified city. It was a city of huge strategic significance. It presented a great obstacle to Israel and to the leader Joshua as they sought to claim that the land that had been promised to them for God.

The Jordan lay behind them. Jericho lay before them. And in Joshua chapter 6, verse 1, we're told this, that Jericho was barred and secured, tightly shut up.

No one went out. No one came in. The city was a formidable barrier. Jericho's walls were apparently impregnable. And in their weakness, how could the Israelites prevail against this great defense of stronghold?

[ 15 : 26 ] How could this stronghold be demolished and the city taken? Well, by faith. By faith in the plan that God provided. And Joshua, we're told at the end of Joshua chapter 5, has to bow the knee to the one who is the commander of the Lord's armies.

And only then is he given God's strategy or plan. And it was a very unusual strategy. In fact, it appeared foolishness.

It involved God's people, and you can read it there in Joshua chapter 6, traipsing around the city for six days. And then on the seventh day, they were to march around the city, not once, but seven times.

And on that final tour of the city, the trumpet was to sound, the horn would sound, and the people would raise a great shout, and the walls would come tumbling down.

And what Joshua and Israel were being shown is that by themselves, they could do nothing to conquer Jericho. Apart from God, they could do nothing.

[16:36] It's God who took the initiative. It's God who takes charge, really. And God who outlines a plan for taking the city. Joshua and Israel are called to submit themselves to God's ways.

They're called to trust and obey. And at the heart of God's plan in Joshua chapter 6, central to it, was the Ark of the Covenant.

It's a great symbol of God's presence and power with His people. In fact, I think in that passage it's mentioned around nine times. It was the Ark that was to be carried around the walls.

And actually, when you read Joshua 6, the narrative underlines this point, that it's the Lord who delivers His people. It's the Lord of hosts, strong and mighty in battle who routes the enemy.

It's the Lord, really, who encompasses the city. It's not Joshua who fits the battle of Jericho, but God. Sometimes, in life, God brings us to a point of helplessness so that we will utterly depend on Him.

[17:48] Sometimes, He boxes us in that, humanly speaking, there appears to be no way out. He brings us to an end of ourselves. That point where our own schemes and options have come to nothing.

All we can do is cast ourselves on the Lord, brought to a place of utter weakness, so that we realize if we do make it through, it must be of God, all of grace, all of His power.

And that hopeless situation can be one of many, many things. It can be crippling anxiety and stress, it can be a broken relationship, it can be a point where we can no longer escape or evade the consequences of our actions, it can be ill health, fear of the future, all sorts of things.

But however it happens, we're brought to a point where we have no one else to turn to, and all we do is we can cry out to the living God for help. Now, of course, plans and strategies are not wrong, far from it.

But they're not the most important thing, because on their own they achieve nothing of eternal value. God's work must be done in God's way. Obstacles, like Jericho, are never removed by mere human ingenuity and skill.

[19:10] Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 10, verse 3 and 4, For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

You see, there is a strategy that is foolishness to the world, but is God's way to victory. The foolishness of God is always wiser than man's wisdom.

How has God's work progressed? Prayerful communion with God must always have a place of priority in the work of God.

We've got that example in Exodus 17, the battle with the Amalekites at Rephidim. The battle raging below. Moses, Aaron, and her climb the hill above and they engage in prayerful intercession. Moses' hands are raised. And when he raises his hands in prayer, the Israelites prevail in the battle. And when they're lowered, the Amalekites then gain the ascendancy. The course of the battle determined not actually by the fighters on the field, but by the intercessors on the mountain.

[20:26] And prayer is an expression of our weakness and our need of God. And all through the Bible, we discover this. God choosing weak, fragile human vessels, clay pots, to display the excellency of His power.

So it doesn't matter if it's an aged Abraham and Sarah, David with his sling, Elijah with his cloak, a wee boy with five loaves and two fishes. God delights to take that which is weak and fragile and so act with divine power that everyone will say, this must be the power of God.

Paul says, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. And the weapon of prayer is what God uses to bring down the strongholds of the enemy.

Because in prayer, we express our abject frailty, human frailty, and need before a sovereign or powerful king. And it may appear foolish, stupid even.

Yet it's through prayer that walls crumble and the strongholds of the enemy are defeated. This is God's way. He calls us to walk in it. He calls us to be a people looking to Him, depending on Him, praying to Him.

[21:49] He calls us to leave sometimes our own human methods and strategies of which we are so fond, and to take up His utter dependence on His presence and power, the way of weakness

and the way of prayer.

And this is how God delights not only to transform circumstances, but to transform ourselves. This is how He reveals His transforming power.

He's the God of keeping power. Look to Him. He's the God of transforming power. Look to Him in prayer. And thirdly here, you'll notice He is the God of saving power.

Verse 31, Faith looks to the God of saving power. By faith, Rahab, the prostitute, did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

And this final reference here again relates to the fall of Jericho. This time it focuses on the salvation of the prostitute Rahab. We read about her.

[ 22 : 57 ] Yes, in Joshua chapter 6, but also a little earlier in Joshua chapter 2. And perhaps a foreign prostitute is not someone we would immediately think of being as a great example of faith, but nonetheless, that's what a writer does here.

Rahab shielded and harbored the Israelite spies that came to Jericho to find out what the story was. And she did that at the risk of her own life.

She welcomed them. She hid them from those who pursued them. She helped them make their escape. Why did she do that? Well, she did it because she received and believed their testimony. She had heard of the great things that the Lord had done for His people. And so, in Joshua chapter 2, verse 8 and following, this is what we read. Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the fear of you has fallen upon us, that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

For we've heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

[ 24 : 13 ] As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted. There was no spirit left in any man because of you. For the Lord, your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my Father's house.

Give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death. And the men said to her, Our life for years even to death, if you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land, we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.

So, Rahab had heard of what God had done for His people, and she formed a conviction on the basis of what she'd heard, and she saw that it was the living God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and so she sought refuge in Him.

She cast herself on His kindness and faithfulness, and in turn, the spies gave her, as the passage tells us a little later, a scarlet cord. That was to be tied to her window.

Her house would become a place of refuge for all who took shelter there. And her household, in a sense, became a kind of island of salvation in the midst of this city under judgment.

[ 25 : 33 ] And the story of Rahab really stands out as a beacon of God's grace and saving power. She was one of the enemies of Israel. She was a pagan.

She was a prostitute. And yet, in His grace and mercy, God brought her to faith and into God's covenant people. She and her people came to settle in Israel.

On the opening page of the New Testament, Matthew 1, verse 5, we read her name as one included in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who would have thought it possible?

And her presence in that sacred genealogy is a reminder to us that Jesus has come to welcome sinners into His family. He's come to show and to demonstrate God's amazing grace.

He has come to reveal the saving power of God. Sometimes, as human beings, we can be weighed down with a sense of our guilt, our unworthiness.

[ 26 : 39 ] sometimes, sometimes, we're rightly ashamed of things that we've said and done. Our lives, we know, are stained and unclean. They're dirty. How can people like us ever belong in God's family?

How could God ever love us after the things we've done? We know, deep down, that we're not good enough for God, that we will never be good enough. I mean, how can Jesus have anything to do with us?

Why on earth would He? But friends, that's why He came. He came to be the friend of sinners. He came to welcome people like us into His fellowship, into His family.

That's why the church isn't a social club. It's a hospital for sinners. It's a shelter for refugees. It's a family for abandoned outcasts.

for if our Lord Jesus was happy to associate with someone such as Rahab, He is happy even to associate with someone like you.

[ 27 : 51 ] And that's the power of God's amazing and surprising grace. Think of the Apostle Paul or someone like the slave traitor John Newton who wrote that famous hymn, Amazing Grace.

Who would have thought it possible that they might be welcomed into the family of God? But it's true for all of us, isn't it? Who would have thought of it of us?

It's all too easy to forget, but we must never lose sight of the God of saving power. God gets His people like Rahab from Jericho, from the city of destruction.

This is where Jesus Christ claims His people. He doesn't get them from heaven. He gets them from the world.

Think of those words of Paul to the Christians in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 6, verse 9 and following, Do you not know that the unrighteous, he says, will not inherit the kingdom of God?

[ 28 : 58 ] Don't be deceived. Not the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, those who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

That's what he says. Then he says this, And such were some of you. Such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

And that is the wonderful reality of the gospel. No matter who we are, no matter what we've done, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.

That is what happens when you become a Christian. That's what happens when you're united to Jesus Christ by faith. This is what Jesus offers to all and everyone who will come to him in faith. He invites you to come to be washed from all the guilt and shame of your sin. He invites you to come and belong to him as a child of God. He invites you to come and not only be forgiven, but actually be declared righteous in his sight.

[ 30 : 10 ] The God of keeping power. Don't be a believer filled with fear and anxiety about the future. Here is the God who has shed his blood for you, whose power will keep you.

Jesus said, my Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. The God of transforming power.

Don't be trapped in despair and despondency over what's happening in your life or what's happening in the world. Here is the God whose power can transform the most impossible of situations.

With God, all things are possible. As the old hymn advises, take it to the Lord in prayer. And he's the God of saving power.

So, no matter who you are, no matter what you've done, you can come to Jesus Christ and find in him all that you need.

[ 31 : 17 ] Don't give up on that person who seems lost, disinterested, for this God, his powerful grace, can save the most far gone of sinners and save to the uttermost.

Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 1, he saved even the worst of sinners. Help me now to live a life that's dependent on your grace.

Keep my heart and guard my soul from the evils that I face. you are worthy to be praised. Within my every thought and deed, O great God of highest heaven, glorify your name through me.

Fix your eyes on this God. Look to him, the God of keeping, transforming, and saving power.

Let's pray. Almighty God, we bless you and praise you that you are indeed a God of power.

[ 32 : 25 ] We thank you for the way in which you have revealed your power in years past and generations past. And we thank you most of all for the way in which you have revealed your power and your grace and your love in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, may we be found looking to him this evening and trusting in him. May you keep us and preserve us. May you use us and bless us in your service and for your glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.