

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part forty-eight

Sunday, April 8th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2041

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

OBEDIENCE WHEN FAITH SEEMS TO LACK EVIDENCE

Hebrews 11:27-31 - "By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. [28] By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. [29] By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. [30] By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. [31] By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies."

These are our writer's last words directly highlighting the faith of Moses. He has chosen his faith exemplars very carefully, picking those he feels will have the deepest impact on his persecuted Jewish believers. He wants his audience to connect their faith with the roots of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses. Faith in Christ is not a *departure* from the faith of these men of God. It is the *fulfillment* of all they longed for and stood for.

What is *different* in today's text is the way our writer moves on to include some very *ordinary* - perhaps even *questionable* - people in his list of faith heroes. And I think our writer has a method in this. After all, any one of his readers might very well be tempted to say, "**Well, sorry, but I just don't rate with God the way Abraham and Jacob and Moses did.**" You may be thinking the same thing this morning. It's a false humility - a kind of pretend spirituality - that we all have to root out of our hearts. The Spirit of God placed these examples in the Scriptures precisely because we need to follow them with the same kind of obedience and trust.

1) FAITH IS FUELED BY THE PROMISE OF GOD MADE VIVID BY THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Hebrews 11:27 - "**By faith** he left Egypt, **not being afraid of the anger of the king**, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."

Moses left Egypt *twice*. The first time he left he ran after defending one of his own people in a fight. In response to his accuser we're told Moses ran because he was *afraid* - **Exodus 2:14-15** - "He answered, 'Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then **Moses was afraid**, and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.' [15] When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian...."

The first time Moses left Egypt he was *afraid of the Pharaoh*. The second time we're specifically told fear never entered into his leaving - **Hebrews 11:27** - "**By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king**, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."

We're meant to see a contrast here. When Moses defends his Jewish brother by impulsively killing the Egyptian attacker he manifests only a *short burst of human courage*. Human emotional energy is not the same as faith in a divine promise. Because Moses' act was impulsive and not directed in the direction of God's promised plan for deliverance Moses can't sustain himself in courage. He has no promise of God to back up his actions. He's out on a limb and he knows it. He's terrified of the consequences.

But when he leaves Egypt the *second* time he has no fear of the Pharaoh because God has *promised* Moses He will deliver Israel from Pharaoh's hand - **Exodus 11:1** - "The LORD said to Moses, 'Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward **he will let you go from here**. When he lets you go, **he will drive you away completely**.'" "

"...**He will let you go from here!**" See the promise of God. As Moses leaves he *knows* he's never coming back. He knows God has a final plan for Pharaoh. He also has the *accumulated evidence* of a *series of delivering events*. Moses has watched as that string of plagues was unpacked under the hand of God. God has acted, and acted again, and again in dealing with Egypt. Moses pays attention and anchors his faith.

That's what our text means when it says Moses "**...endured as seeing him who is invisible**" (11:27). Certainly God is invisible. But our writer still doesn't mean Moses *pretended* to see God. He means Moses really *saw* his invisible God taking *visible promise-keeping steps* to fulfill His intention for Israel. Moses' faith is a *thoughtful faith*. It's a faith *remembering* what God had done so far. It's a *big-picture* faith.

So far so good. But the next step in this teaching is to see *what this has to do with us*. God made a **promise of deliverance** to Moses. And Moses could actually **see a series of events fulfilling that promise**. The next verse in our text applies these ideas to **our deliverance and the promise of God**.

2) GOD PLANTS VISIBLE EVENTS INTO OUR MENTAL PROCESSING TO ASSURE OUR FAITH

Hebrews 11:28 - "By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them."

Of course, our text is speaking of Moses' keeping of the **very first Passover** while Israel was still captive in Egypt. The blood spoken of was the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the doorposts of the house after the cooked lamb was eaten.

The LORD was about to strike the firstborn in all of Egypt with death. But if He saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts He would "**passover**" that house:

Exodus 11:4-5 - "So Moses said, 'Thus says the LORD: 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, [5] and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle.'"

Exodus 12:27-29 - "....'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. [28] Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. [29] At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock."

Here's the important point. There was no other privilege or action that could provide safety from judgment. Only this shed blood provided safety. Nothing else could be relied on for relief. If this Passover blood was ignored all hope was lost, even if you were an Israelite.

Now remember where we are. This second point is **God plants visible events into our memories to assure our faith**. Then we come to the New Testament. We know of our sin and our guilt. We are all aware of the battles we constantly fight with our worst inclinations. We know what our **hearts** are like, even when we manage to keep them under some control. And we know the holiness of God. We sing about it every Sunday.

What gives us confidence in divine grace? What makes us so sure of pardon? How can we know our faith in peace with God isn't just wishful thinking? The Apostle Paul answers those questions by turning our minds back to the faith of Moses and that shed blood that assured God's people of divine provision from the fear of judgment:

1 Corinthians 5:7b - "....For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

Consider this. When God commanded Moses and all Israel to perpetually celebrate the **Passover** He didn't just have Israel in mind. We need this account to add **memory** to our **faith**. **Christ's shed blood is pre-pictured to give details and images for our faith**. We are being **trained to expect deliverance from both judgment and death**. Remember, there is both **deliverance from judgment** and **deliverance from death though the Passover cross of Christ**.

Just as Moses understood the **meaning** of that first Passover by **looking at the actual event** we find the **meaning of pardon and life** by looking at the actual event of the cross and resurrection. Faith in invisible cleansing is anchored to visible events.

3) BIBLICAL REVELATION AND THE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATION THAT GOD WILL ULTIMATELY TREAT EVERYONE ALIKE

Hebrews 11:29 - "By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned."

Let me ask you a question you may never have considered before. We know the Israelites crossed the Red Sea **“by faith”** - **“By faith the people crossed the Red Sea....”** The text makes it very clear they crossed the Red Sea at the specific command of God to **“go forward”** into the sea - **Exodus 14:15-16** - **“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. [16] Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.’”**

But what made the Egyptians attempt to do the same? What would make them think **they** were safe crossing just because the Israelites were safe crossing?

Remember, these were people who had **witnessed** the judgment of God for their oppression of Israel. They had **witnessed** the way Moses warned of the judgment of God on Egypt repeatedly - eventually culminating in the death of the first born in all of Egypt. And these judgments were **predicted before they arrived** so the people would **know** they weren't just coincidental.

These Egyptians **saw** the judgment of God over and over. They **knew** God was acting in the deliverance of His people. And yet they can't seem to **stop themselves**. They somehow think they will experience the same holding back of the waters of the Red Sea **in the same way** God was doing it for Israel. They seemed to bank on the assumption God wouldn't ultimately **differentiate** between people on **His own terms** - that He was somehow morally obligated by some standard existing outside of Himself to accept everyone on **their own terms** rather than **His**.

This is very common logic. God **must** be tolerant of everyone because that's how democracy works. And the dead bodies of the drowned Egyptians is an eternal lesson of the opposite truth. **Believing** you will fare well with God apart from His appointed means of redemption provides no ultimate safety whatsoever.

4) **FAITH FOLLOWS THE LORD IN OBEDIENCE EVEN WHEN THAT OBEDIENCE SEEMS POWERLESS TO SOLVE PRESENT DILEMMAS**

Hebrews 11:30 - **“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.”**

What could possibly be the point in walking around Jericho **seven days**? God could have caused the walls to crumble after five, or three, or, better yet, after **one** day. Why not just one march around the city and then a shout of victory and then collect the spoils. We all know **God was giving them the city anyway**. Why make it take so long?

There is a reason for the seven day march. Faith, if it is to be tested and proven genuine, always needs **opportunity to back out**. The seven days were needed, not to make the walls fall, but to make Joshua's and Israel's faith look **determined and persistent**. Faith that isn't proven over time - faith that isn't given opportunity to back out - is never proven to be **loyal** faith. Faith isn't precious until it refuses opportunity to quit and back out.

Imagine the possible thoughts fighting soldiers might have dart through their minds as they marched around the walls - and imagine how many times those thoughts might have gathered weight as they had time to reappear over and over. Imagine how silly it all looked - soldiers walking **behind** a bunch of priests. And then blowing horns. What was **that** all about?

The obvious point of application is this. When I have walls that need breaking down - when what seems to be piling up against me **looks incredibly fortified** - many of the things God seems to call me to do **day after day** look incredibly **unrelated** to the situation I want solved. God gives opportunity for obedience to wane and faith to fade. **He's more interested in the loyalty of my faith than the quick solution to my problem.**

5) **FAITH IS WILLING TO RISK PRESENT SECURITY FOR PROMISED FUTURE BLESSING**

Hebrews 11:31 - **“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”**

Incredibly, this list of the faithful that starts with **Abel** ends with a gentile prostitute named **Rahab**. God can work with any heart that takes His word and will seriously. There don't appear to be any other pre-existing qualifications.

The inclusion of Rahab is intentional. Just as not many here would feel as qualified before God as **Moses**, not many would feel as **disqualified** as **Rahab**. Behold the wisdom and glory in divine revelation.

Here's all we know about the roots of Rahab's faith - **Joshua 2:9-11** - "...and [she] said to the men, 'I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. [10] For we have 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 who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. [11] And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and 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.'"

What you are seeing in these verses is an immoral, pagan woman who looks at what God is up to in these events with Israel and simply says, ***"I get it. God is delivering you. God is giving you victory. God parted the Red Sea. I get it. There is no other God. The idols of my people are nothing. Remember me when God gives you this city!"***

We should be grateful our writer of Hebrews actually finishes off his austere list of the faithful with the beginning point - the very birth-point - of this pagan prostitute's faith. Even great faith has to begin somewhere. And all qualify. Any person can come to this point of honesty. Any person at all can take revelation of divine truth seriously. And it makes all the difference in the world when he or she does.

This open sinner joins the glorious host of the faithful and the delivered. She refuses to perish with the disobedient. Nothing in her past disqualified her from pressing into faith and deliverance.

Now you have all heard the truth. The very same divine truth from the same delivering God.