

## INTRODUCTION

A teenager named Billy got a job at Six Flags sweeping the grounds. Billy was so tall and thin that when a strong wind came up, it would blow him off balance. His supervisor saw the problem and suggested Billy put some rocks in his pockets to make him heavier. This worked. Billy was religious guy so every morning when he put the rocks in his pockets, he prayed, "Now I weigh me down to sweep."

The New Testament warns about being blown about by every wind of doctrine. But we are in the rock solid part of the Bible that teaches us about faith. Hebrews 11 is all about faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Over these past few weeks we have been strolling through God's Faith Hall of Fame.

Hebrews 11:28-31 (NIV). "By faith he [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. 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."

In this message we will look at four episodes of moving forward in faith. Two of them are from the life of Moses, one is from Joshua, and the fourth is about Rahab, one of only two women named in God's Faith Hall of Fame.

### **1. PASSOVER: Faith trusts the power of the blood of the Lamb**

In the last message, we left Moses there at the burning bush after God called him to go tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" Moses returned to Egypt after fleeing it forty years earlier. When Pharaoh refused to free the Hebrew slaves, God sent a series of plagues to the land of Egypt.

These ten plagues weren't just random disasters, they were sent by God to rebuke the false gods and goddesses of Egypt. The Egyptians worshipped Hapi, the god of the Nile, so the Living God turned the water to blood. Heket was the goddess of fertility, who had the head of a frog, so God sent millions of frogs to disrupt life. Let's see how many frog puns I can do. It must have been a ribbeting experience. It was a toadal disaster, and without any choice all the women were forced to wear open toad sandals. It made Pharaoh hopping mad, but he still refused to let the children of Israel leave. All the other plagues, insects, livestock diseases, darkness, and huge fiery hailstones all were directed to show the Egyptians that their gods were false and powerless before the true and living God.

Then in Exodus 12 God told Moses He would send one final plague upon Egypt. He gave them two weeks to prepare. Each family should take an unblemished lamb in the prime of its life. Near sunset they were to kill the spotless lamb and then smear its blood on both doorposts and the lintel of their homes. Then they were to roast the lamb, and eat it that night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They had to eat all the lamb, and leave nothing for the next

day. They didn't know it yet, but they needed nutrition and strength for the long journey ahead.

At midnight, God would send the destroyer to Egypt to kill the firstborn in every family. But wherever God saw the blood of the lamb, the death sentence would pass over them, and that family would not receive a death sentence.

Can you imagine the smell of 250,000 lambs being roasted that afternoon? And the Jews followed God's directions down to the tiniest detail. That night God's judgment on a sinful nation arrived.

This final plague of death was really against the Egyptian Pharaoh, who was worshipped as a god. The Egyptians considered him their divine protector. I believe the Egyptians had heard about how to escape God's judgment, they just didn't obey God's instructions. Whenever God sends judgment, He always sends a way to escape the judgment.

Let's visit the palace of Pharaoh that evening. Perhaps the oldest son says, "Dad, did you hear what Moses said about death coming to the firstborn unless that family kills and eats the lamb after putting the blood on the doorposts? Don't you think we ought to maybe do what the Hebrew God has told them to do?" Pharaoh says, "Son, don't listen to that old religious fanatic talk about the blood of the lamb. I am the most powerful man in the world, and there are guards surrounding this palace and posted outside your room. Besides my power, all of our gods will protect you." But that night at midnight there was a flash, and a gasp, and a scream, and Pharaoh's son was dead.

As many of you know, I am a student of Biblical art. A few years ago I was visiting the Smithsonian Art Museum in Washington. I found a painting by the American artist Charles Sprague Pearce. It is called "The Lamentation over the Firstborn in Egypt." It pictures a mother and father as they prepare to bury their firstborn. I stood transfixed as I stared at the scene. The artist captured the hopeless grief of this couple.

That same night Pharaoh granted the Hebrews their liberty to leave. And to this day, the Jews still commemorate this event by observing Passover every spring. But we don't have to observe Passover because the New Testament tells us that Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us. God has given us a way to escape His judgment and it is through the blood of the Lamb of God. The Bible says, "For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb." (1 Peter 1:18-19 CSB)

And exactly like the Passover Lamb, Jesus was an unblemished sacrifice. He never sinned. He was in the prime of His life when He died. And He passed away on the cross just before sunset. When the blood of the Lamb is applied to our hearts we are saved. But remember, they roasted and ate the Lamb. In the same way, Christ who dwells in us gives us energy for the journey before us.

Has the blood of the Lamb been applied to your heart? Have you received Christ by faith to live in you and give you strength? It's the only way to escape the coming judgment. I can't prove that, so you must accept it by faith.

## **2. RED SEA: Faith is the victory that overcomes our enemies**

That very night, the Hebrews left. The Bible tells us it was a huge group of people. There were six hundred thousand men. So when you add women and children their numbers could have easily have been over two million people. They followed Moses eastward toward the Red Sea. Meanwhile, Pharaoh, who is a type of Satan, changed his mind. He decided to pursue the Israelites and kill them. So he gathers his army and they set out on horses and chariots to catch and slaughter the Jews.

So here was Moses with an uncrossable sea in front of him and a bloodthirsty army pursuing him. God said, "What's that in your hand?" It was the staff Moses had surrendered to God at the burning bush. Moses held the staff over the water and the waters stood up on either side, and let a dry pathway for them to cross through. And when Pharaoh's army followed, the walls of water collapsed and drowned them. What a victory!

A little boy was having Sunday lunch with his family. He was excited about the story he had learned in Sunday School that morning. He said, "God is so awesome! He parted the Red Sea and the Hebrews walked through to the other side." His uncle who was a university professor said, "Now, son, don't get too excited, because modern scholarship has determined that it was actually the Sea of Reeds and it was only six inches deep, and so that's how the Hebrews walked through."

The little boy frowned for a moment and then he said, "Wow! God is even greater than I thought!" His uncle said, "What do you mean?" He said, "It's a greater miracle that Pharaoh's army could be drowned in six inches of water!"

The lesson for us is that sometimes we face a sea of resistance in front of us and we are being chased from behind. We have an enemy who wants to pursue us and keep us from finding God's best. His name is Satan. We actually fight one enemy on three sides. We battle against the devil, who is the Tempter; the world, which is the temptation, and our own flesh, which is the tempted. But by faith, we can win the victory over our enemies just as Moses did. The Bible says, "Everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith." (1 John 5:4 CSB) It doesn't say our victory comes by fighting; it comes by faith. That's what Hebrews 11 is all about.

When it comes to victory over the world; the flesh; and the devil, we have to believe that we already have victory. We're not fighting FOR victory; we are trusting FROM victory. Jesus has already won the victory on the cross, and that is the victory that we can claim

One of the best-loved old hymns is "Victory in Jesus." There's a story behind every song, so let's go behind the music. E. M. Bartlett was born in 1885 and after he became a Christian, he

devoted his entire life to gospel music. He was the founder of Central Music Company in Arkansas. The company was successful in finding and publishing gospel music hymnals. He wrote many gospel songs himself and helped songwriters get their music published.

In 1939, a stroke rendered Bartlett partially paralyzed and unable to travel. He would spend the next two years of his life bedridden before he would die at age 56. During this time of dealing with his stroke, he faced many personal challenges. He had been a healthy, vibrant businessman and songwriter. But it was during this time that his body was weakened that he wrote the song, "Victory in Jesus." He was bedridden, but he was claiming victory by faith.

The second stanza says, "I heard about His healing, of his cleansing pow'r revealing. How he made the lame to walk again and caused the blind to see. And then I cried, 'Dear Jesus, come and heal my broken spirit,' And somehow Jesus came and brought to me the victory!" He found victory even in the days when he was suffering from a stroke.

### **3. JERICHO: Faith requires patience and obedience**

Now, let's fast-forward over forty years. Moses was an old man when he climbed a tall mountain and looked over the Promised Land. But his work was done. God had appointed another leader, Joshua, to lead them in. Moses died there in the wilderness at age 120.

The first major obstacle Joshua faced was the massive fortified city of Jericho. I've been to Jericho many times, and to this day they claim Jericho is the oldest continually inhabited city in the world. It was a huge city surrounded by thick walls. Not only was Jericho great in size, but also it was also great in iniquity. It was the center of the pagan Canaanite worship of many gods, which included child sacrifice. God was not only giving Jericho to the Hebrews, He was also bringing judgment against the wicked city.

The traditional military strategy would surround the city and starve it out. Or they could use direct military attack and try to breach the walls. But God had another plan. He told them to march around the city once a day for six days. Seven priests playing trumpets would lead the parade followed by the ark. Then He told them to march around the city seven times on the seventh day.

"Early on the seventh day, they started at dawn and marched around the city seven times in the same way. That was the only day they marched around the city seven times. After the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, and Joshua said to the troops, 'Shout! For the Lord has given you the city.'" (Joshua 6:15-16 CSB)

"So the troops shouted, and the trumpets sounded. When they heard the blast of the trumpet, the troops gave a great shout, and the wall collapsed. The troops advanced into the city, each man straight ahead, and they captured the city." (Joshua 6:20 CSB)

There are two great lessons we can learn from this event—faith to obey, and patience to wait. What were they doing when they marched around the city? They were obeying God. I can

imagine a mighty Hebrew warrior who complained and said, "What are we doing just walking in circles? The enemy is right there on the walls, laughing at us. Let's attack them!" And Joshua told him to get back in line and keep walking. The soldier said, "Why do we have to keep walking in circles?" And Joshua said, "Because God told us to." The soldier replies, "But I don't understand how this is going to conquer the city." And Joshua says, "Your job is not to understand; your job is to obey."

Much of what we are called to do in the Christian life is to obey this book. This book is not primarily meant to be understood; it is meant to be obeyed. There are still plenty of parts of it that I don't understand. But I am not to lean on my own understanding; I am to trust in the Lord with all my heart and he will make a way for me.

So we must obey God by faith even when we don't understand WHY He tells us to obey him.

The other lesson is about patience to wait. They had to walk in the same circle for six days straight. Then on the seventh day they got up early to walk around it seven times. Once, twice, three times around. Can you imagine one of the soldiers saying, "Now wait a minute. I'm tired of this! We did it for six days, and it didn't work. We've done it three times today and it hasn't worked. I'm tired. I quit." If the whole army had that attitude, the walls would still be standing. But God was teaching them the great lesson of patience, of waiting on the Lord's timing. At times it may seem like your obedience is just taking you in circles. There's nothing wrong with a repeating pattern of walking with the Lord. You should never grow weary of doing well, reading the Word, praying and helping others. And if you are waiting on a promise from God, don't give up. His timing is impeccable. God wants you to have faith to obey and patience to wait.

#### **4. RAHAB: Faith transforms a prostitute into a princess**

When Joshua sent spies to scout out Jericho, they met a prostitute named Rahab. It wouldn't have seemed unusual for two strangers to visit a brothel. Rahab had already heard about the greatness of the God of the Hebrews. In her line of business she probably heard the stories from men who had traveled extensively, and they brought stories of this multitude of mighty men and women who were moving toward them. The first step in salvation is hearing about the greatness of God. The second step is believing in God. Rahab had taken both steps. She had heard and she believed. She told the spies, "I know that the Lord has given this land to you."

The next step in salvation is demonstrating good works. Rahab hid the Hebrew spies when the Jericho SWAT team entered her house. The consequence of salvation is to escape the judgment of God. On the day that God sent judgment against the godless culture of Jericho, Rahab's house and family were spared because she had been instructed to hang a scarlet rope out her window.

So when Jericho fell, Rahab and her family were spared. The Bible says, "Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, her father's family, and all who belonged to her, because she hid

the messengers Joshua had sent to spy on Jericho, and she still lives in Israel today." (Joshua 6:25 CSB)

Rahab had chosen a new life. She knew what she was doing was wrong, and she longed for a new lifestyle. She also chose a new faith. She rejected the pagan religion of her culture to believe in the one true God. She also chose a new family. It's not in the Bible, but Jewish tradition says one of the spies was named Salmon, and he later married Rahab. And when you come to the New Testament, you find the Davidic lineage of Jesus the Messiah, and guess whose name we find? Rahab is not only here in God's Faith Hall of Faith; she's in Jesus' family tree.

"Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered King David." (Matthew 1:5-6 CSB) So Rahab had a son named Boaz who married Ruth. Before Boaz met her, he was a ruthless man. Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David, which means that Rahab, who was once a prostitute, was the great-great-grandmother of the greatest King in the history of Israel. She was a matriarch in the line of the sinless Savior whose blood is our scarlet line of protection from the judgment of God.

Herbert Lockyer, who wrote about all the women in the Bible makes an interesting comment about Rahab: "Rahab's sins had been scarlet, but the scarlet line displayed as a token of her safety, typified the red blood of Jesus whereby the worst of sinners can be saved from sin and hell." (*All the Women of the Bible*, p. 131)

A few years ago, we had a guest speaker named Iris Bellew. Iris had been a prostitute from the time she was a teenager. She had gotten into drugs, and had spent much of her life in prison. One evening, she was on the streets of Houston attempting to sell her body to men who passed by. Some men from a Baptist Church were sharing the gospel of Jesus. They explained to Iris that with Jesus, she could be born again. The message struck a chord in her heart, and she knelt down and opened her heart to Jesus. She described her conversion on the street corner in Houston this way: "I knelt down a tramp, and stood up a lady!" That's what faith in a powerful God can do!

## CONCLUSION

As we talk about these faith heroes, I don't want you to just admire them; I want you to emulate their faith. Faith is putting our trust in what which we cannot see.

How many of you have ever ridden a Ferris wheel? The first Ferris wheel was invented by George Washington Ferris. He built the Chicago Wheel for the World's Colombian exhibition in 1898. It was a huge wheel soaring almost 300 feet into the air—the length of a football field. But nobody wanted to ride it because it was so new and untested. Besides, on that first night it opened, there was a strong gusty wind shaking the wheel.

But George Ferris and his wife got in one of the cars and rode around several rotations as the crowd watched. When the wheel stopped, the Ferris' got off with smiles on their faces, and soon the ride became the largest attraction in the exposition.

As an engineer, Ferris began with the scientific knowledge that the wheel should work, and it would be safe. But knowledge wasn't enough. It was only after they got on the ride did they display personal faith that the machine worked.

You may have head knowledge that Jesus can change your life, and take you to heaven. But go ahead, the ticket has already been purchased, get in and buckle up—you can trust Him. And faith will take you for the ride of your life!

And throughout your life you will come to places where there seems to be no way out. Don't worry, just keep on moving forward in faith and God will make a way.

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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