

Faith of Sinners
Hebrews 11:30-40

Psalm 46
1 Corinthians 13
responsive Psalm 43

Turn with me this morning to Hebrews chapter 11, today we will be focusing on verse's 30-40. NOT SURE YET! As we have been studying through this chapter I have found that taking this time to sort of deep dive into the doctrines of faith, what it is, where it comes from, and the power of God which works through it has been quite a good study.

I have found it encouraging and it has helped me to focus my heart and mind upon our loving father, and to rejoice and rest in the peace and love that he has given. Having a deeper understanding of God and his providence, and to see how in each of these lives that we have been studying, the very things that seemed impossible is the very thing that God promised, and not only promised but fulfilled.

This should cause our hearts to rejoice, and honestly should bring peace beyond understanding as scripture says, for as we may look at things, what ever it may be, to know that our God is the God of impossible things, gives us hope in our lives, and power in our prayers. Looking at our text this morning, we see now after Moses that in verse 30 is the mention of the fall of Jericho. The author here says, it was by faith that these walls fell, it was the work of God through the people of Israel following his command.

We have examples here of the faith, work relationship. For as in Abraham and Isaac, God told Abraham to take his son, and sacrifice him. There was a work involved in this command, and a faith that was operating in this work to believe that God would yet still provide that which he promised, even if it meant that he would raise Isaac from the dead. It is no different here with the walls of Jericho, God told them to march around the walls in a certain way, for a certain amount of days and the walls then crumbled, but not only did they come down, they fell inward upon the people living there, not upon the Israelites. Now when God told them to march around the city, they could have not believed him, they could have not marched around the city....but they believed God, that he would deliver so they did. And it was their faith, which was shown by their actions which pleased God to keep his word.

And this really is what faith is, is it not? To simply believe and trust God? We all have these Jerichos in our life, unpassable, impossible, ominous walls, whether it be sins, doubts, despair, depression, our jobs, relationships, you name it... it can be any number of things that we struggle with, but the reality is that all of these issues are minuscule in comparison to the love and power of our Lord and savior, who is not only willing, but capable to bring these walls down. IF you believe this to be true, then that should be how we operate. Does not scripture say, that in Christ we are more than conquerors?

That sin that you struggle with, that seems to keep coming up....you are not powerless against it, because you have the very holy spirit of the mighty sovereign creator and lord of all residing in you. This spirit of God Who convicts you, who tells you that this is wrong and to turn from it. IF God can do all that we see in scripture, if God has sent his son to die for you so that you may be reconciled to him, will he not also give you the power over sin through the blood of his son? We have been freed from the flesh, and have been given the faith to live by the spirit. We are no longer trapped and enslaved to our desires, our emotions, but through God we can be more than conquerors having been forgiven. But that is the whole point, it is God who saves, it is God who forgives, it is God who has given us this faith to believe. We bring nothing to this table except our own wretchedness, and it is purely and solely only by the grace and mercy of God that we can stand before him as beloved children.

In our text this morning we have the example of Rahab, the harlot. Even here, thousands of years later she is referenced as the Harlot, this however was a discription of who she was before she had come to faith, just as even after joining up with Jesus, Matthew was still known as Matthew the tax collector, as well as Simon being known as the Zealot even though those were both occupations and lives that they had left behind them. I think that the inclusion of these titles even after their coming to faith acts not only as a reminder of where they had come from, but it also shows of the glory and mercy of God. As Calvin said, “The designation harlot heightens the grace of God. Grace, together with the faith it evokes, is for sinners, and it was precisely sinners, not the self-righteous who blind themselves to their sin and their need, whom Christ came to call to repentance. “

Likewise Christ rebuked the self righteous, and those who were claiming to be holy in Matthew, were he says, speaking to the religious leaders there, “ Assuredly I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but tax collectors and harlots believed him, and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.”

Rahab was one of these, she was a harlot, who believed and is therefore rightly included in this list of the faithful, for she did not parish with the unbeliever in Jericho, but was instead spared and numbered among those who believed, for she believed that the God of Israel was the true God who would give them the land which was promised to them as we see in the account recorded in the book of Joshua, chapter 2, verse 9 “ She said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the red sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Not only do we see in Rahab this example of a sinner coming to faith, in comparison with Israel she was a foreigner, she was not born of the offspring of Abraham, yet she is listed here in this list of the faithful, which as we see in the new testament are indeed the true promised offspring of Abraham, and it is no different here for Rahab, for her faith and belief in the one true God has in effect graphed her into this illustrious family tree of those who have the faith of Abraham. But not only that, according to the genealogy outlined at the beginning of Matthews Gospel book, Rahab who was an oursider, not a natural born member of Abraham's line, married Salmon and became the mother of Boaz, who in turn also married a gentile woman, Ruth, who became the mother of Obed who was King David's grand father.

As we have talked about the providence of God last week, and we all let out a sigh a bit when it comes to the genealogies in scripture, but they stand as proof of God's sovereign work, even throughout the natural events of marriage and child birth to effect his ultimate will. And here, in the genealogy of our Lord and savior is a harlot, but one who came to faith, who believed and is accounted as righteous because of her faith.

Caesarius of Arlse, who was a preacher from 470-542ad when speaking on this passage, he equated the fall of Jericho will the symbolic overthrowing of worldly opposition to God by the preaching of the word, and also equated rahab the harlot as a picture of the church. He said,

“Jericho, dearest brothers, was a type of this world, for just as its walls fell at the sound of the trumpets, so also now the city of the world, that is human arrogance with its towers, namely, greed, envy, and luxury, together with its population, that is, all evil lusts, must be destroyed and must perish by the unremitted preaching of priests. For priests must not be silent in the church, but must hear the Lord saying, cry aloud, do not cease, lift up your voice like a trumpet and denounce the sins of my people. There is no doubt that all these things were done in a figurative manner, for what else do we think the priestly trumpets of that time prefigured than the priestly preaching of this time, by which the preachers do not cease to proclaim with terrible note severe judgment to sinners. For Rahab, this harlot, dearest brothers, was a figure of the church, which before Christ's advent used to commit fornication with many idols. But when Christ came he not only delivered her from fornication but also by a great miracle made her a virgin; for the apostle says concerning the church, I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

Aquinas also went on to say, “that the liberation of Rahab as a result of her reception of the spies signifies that those who receive preachers of the Gospel are liberated from eternal death.” So again we see that this belief and salvation comes by faith, not of works, and that it is truly a gift from God, and it is a gift given to sinners, to those who are not self righteous, but to those whose righteousness comes from another, to those those who recognize that there is nothing in themselves redeemable other than what God has given and has caused, not a mere ascent to his existence, or some sort of expressed belief, but a true vibrant faith that wells up from within the soul working in each and every one of us to believe in this mighty sovereign Lord.

As we start getting into the last bit of this chapter we see the Author here begins to summarize more. Likely realizing that if he was to continue to write as he has been he would probably have to write an entirely new letter on this point alone if he were to go through each of these individuals on this list. In the phrase here, “what more can I say” it denotes that fact that he believes that his point has been given and that he has presented a significant enough body of evidence to prove it. The concept that he started with in verse 1, that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen has been proven out by the examples he has given here up until this point. I know that we have read it once already today, but I want to read it here again, verses 33-38,

This faith endures through the most horrendous of sufferings, because the eye of the faithful is not upon the present, but upon the promises, upon the promised deliverance. And of all of these listed here, of these faithful who have suffered greatly, the author writes, “of whom the world was not worthy.” These stricken, tortured, poor and destitute, hated, and despised by the world, are rich beyond compare because of their faith, are ones who the world is not worthy of because of God. Just as Moses deemed the blessings of God to be far greater than all the riches in Egypt, he esteemed himself stricken, cast off his Egyptian royalty to be identified with the oppressed.

Again, I think we often forget the glories and riches we have, again focusing on our trials and issues of the day. But the reality is, that this life is temporary, all things pass, and ultimately our riches and our glory are tied in the next life. I am reminded of Jesus' words recorded in the book of Matthew when he says, “Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.” This same God, who not only has the power and ability to destroy both body and soul in the everlasting pit of hell, also has the power and mercy to save our souls from such fate if we but trust believe, and love him. Many preachers stop by saying trust and believe, but to love him is to trust him, and to believe him, is to love him. For many can believe, but it seems few truly love and without love, as Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians we read this morning, without this love, we have nothing, it profits us nothing. Faith without love, is not faith, belief without love is not belief, without the love of God flowing through us, the works that we do become like filthy rags, for they are done in our own pride, and in our own arrogance.

We are all sinners, justified by faith, as our father Abraham was justified by faith. We are sinners who believe in a God who promises to forgive us, but not only that, we have believe in this God who sent is son to make that forgiveness possible, who paid the price of our sins for us so that we may become a righteous people. And looking at the last 2 verses of our chapter today, how glorious and merciful is our God, who has taken each and every one of us, sinners worthy of death and destruction and no matter our sin, has justified us and made us pure. He has taken us, all a bunch of Rahabs who once walked according to this world, justifying and seeking after our own lusts and pleasure and has given us a new birth, has made us new creatures so that we maybe holy and without blame, spotless virgins and the bride of Christ. And he has done this, in such away that we are all recipiants of this same reward, as it says in the last 2 verses here, talking about these people of faith who have gone before, who suffered, who had died in their faith he says, “ and all of these having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise.

They died before the messiah came, yet they died in faith believing the Messiah to come, and now us who are on this side of the cross he says, in verse 40. “God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” We are all in this lineage, we are all in this faith and God has seen fit to make us all equals before him. As Paul says, there is neither slave not free, neither jew nor gentile, but we are all one in Christ.

Praise God for his mercy, Praise God for the gift of faith that he has given so that we may be able to believe. For without it, we would still be lost, enslaved to our sins, hopeless and without mercy. But God, who is rich is mercy, who abounds in grace, has chosen you, a sinner, to be saved by grace. Do not discredit this faith, do not allow yourself to fall into despair, for the God who is sovereign over all things has chosen you for his purpose, and nothing, there is nothing that will happen to you outside of his purpose and plan. IT is in this that we must rest, it is in this that we find our peace, that no matter our desires, no matter our trials or tribulations, we have a loving father, who chose us before the world was, he will not abandon, nor forsake us. We are one with these many listed here in these last verses, we are a part of this family of God, the faithful, the true israel, those who are stricken, who suffer, those who this world is not worthy, and we have a sovereign Lord who has overcome this world!