

Sermon Transcript

08.02.2026

Hebrews 11:29-31

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- Good morning. Please open your Bibles to Hebrews 11:29-31.
- As you do, I want to tell you about a battle that took place nearly 2250 years ago today.
- The date was August 2, 216BC at the Battle of Cannae (Cannie) in SE Italy, during the second Punic War between the Roman Republic and Carthage. The Carthaginians, led by Hannibal, practically annihilated the larger Roman army in what has been regarded as one of the greatest tactical achievements in warfare history.
- In fact, though I'm sure few of us had ever heard of this particular battle before, many of us have at least heard of Hannibal. He's one of those names that we've heard from history, but can't quite remember anything substantive about him.
- Well, he was a brilliant military strategist, up there in the top 10 military geniuses of all time with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon.
- And I ran across this anecdote as I was prepping for the sermon this week and it struck me how different that is from many of the military strategies we see employed in Scripture.
- Consider the case of Gideon. He has an army of over 30,000, but whittles it down to 300.
- Or in 2 Chronicles Jehoshaphat sends the choir and worship band in front of the army.
- Or Saul sending an untested shepherd boy to fight a giant.
- Or, as in our text today,
- Just watching and waiting as the Egyptian army drew near to the banks of the Red Sea.
- Or marching around the walls of Jericho and blowing some trumpets.
- Those don't seem like brilliant tactical strategies.
- I would imagine if someone suggested that at West Point, they'd not make it very far.
- And in the moment, I'm sure these tactics sounded like madness to the Israelites as well.
- As much madness as the previous weeks and the command to put some blood over your door to protect against the destroyer of the firstborn or the command to sacrifice your long promised son or the command to leave your family and your land and sojourn to this unknown locale.
- Such commands seem almost comical, such strategies almost silly, and yet they are the means by which God vindicates His people and His power. They are how God delivers the people from giants and armies and how cities are decimated.
- Likewise, consider how foolish God's wisdom might seem to us today.
- Don't have sex until marriage. Give money to the local church and to others in need. Get up early to read your Bible. Bless those who curse you. Forgive those who hurt you. Turn the other cheek. Consider the needs of others more than your own. Rejoice in suffering.
- What possible motivation could we have to do such things?
- In a word – faith.
- The theme of Hebrews 11. How its developed in vss. 29-31, we'll see this morning, but first let's pray.
- Self, others, me.

- Anytime you read a text, you need to consider the context. After all, anything can be taken out of context.
- For example, the Bible says there is no God, but lest we all go out and buy some Darwin fish and coexist stickers for our Subarus, we should consider the context which says what? The fool says in his heart there is no god.
- The vast majority of interpretive errors that Christians make it because they refuse to consider the context. I can do all things through Christ doesn't mean you can bench press 350. Judge not lest you be judged doesn't give you permission to sin without rebuke. God's promise to prosper Israel doesn't mean you'll be healthy and wealthy. Those are all examples of where the context helps to avoid some shallow error.
- That's why every week we set the scene by trying to orient the passage to the larger chapter and book. Yes, it adds an extra 5 minutes to an already relatively long sermon, but its worth it because:
 - First, we could all use longer attention spans and the only way to increase your attention span is to force yourself to grow accustomed to it.
 - Second, we don't want to take something out of context and thus believe some falsehood about God or the gospel.
 - And third, all week long the enemy has been seeking to uproot the word that was spoken last week, so the Bible itself says that we need to be stirred up by means of regular reminders.
- So let's consider the context this morning starting with the book as a whole.
- The entire book of Hebrews is an exposition of the supremacy and superiority and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.
- As compared and contrasted to the OT types and shadows of Moses, Joshua, the Aaronic priests, the tabernacle, etc., Christ is better.
- That's the message of Hebrews. Christ is better. A better priest offering a better sacrifice providing access to a better sanctuary on the basis of a better covenant built on better promises.
- You may get tired of hearing me say that, but I guarantee you that you'll never forget it and that's the point.
- Every sin and struggle in your life boils down to a fight to take hold of the supremacy of Christ. When your marriage is falling apart or your body is wasting away or your child is running away or your job is gone or your fear is out of control, you need to remember that Christ is better.
- And if Christ is better then faith and obedience are always worth it.
- Otherwise, we wouldn't say that Christ is better, but sin is better.
- So Christ is better. That banner rings out from every chapter of Hebrews and it really picks up steam in chapters 7-10 in which we see the emphasis and focus on Christ's superior priesthood and superior sacrifice.
- The Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic covenant and the sacrifices were good, but not ultimate. They were types or shadows that prepared the way for the finished work of Christ who is the point, the goal, the telos, the culmination of God's redemptive work.
- And this emphasis on Christ's supremacy climaxes in the final verse of chapter 10 which says:
 - *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.* (Hebrews 10:39)
- Now, to understand this, we need to consider the theme of shrinking back that runs through the book.
- In 2:1, we read this warning

- *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (Hebrews 2:1)*
- *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. (Hebrews 4:1)*
- *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:11)*
- And chapter 6 speaks of falling away and growing sluggish.
- So we've seen this danger described using various images and metaphors in Hebrews.
- And this would have been of particular interest to the first century readers who are experiencing suffering. In particular, they're being persecuted. Some imprisoned, others having their goods plundered.
- And with the persecution comes a temptation. The temptation to recant, to relent, to drift away, to fall back, to shrink back. Back to their Jewish roots or back to the synagogue or back to the Mosaic Covenant or at least away from Christ and His body.
- So the author has written this exposition of the supremacy of Christ as an exhortation to hold fast. To draw near.
- Why drift to the shadows, when you can draw near to the substance? Why pursue what is inferior when you already have what is better? That's the question which undergirds the book
- So in chapter 10, the final verse holds out two paths. First, you can shrink back to destruction. Or you can faithfully persevere to preservation.
- But what is faith? What does it look like?
- That's chapter 11.
- Starting in vs. 1 we read
 - *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)*
- That's the essential nature of faith and to demonstrate that, the author begins plumbing the OT for examples of faith in action.
- Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses.
- Hebrews 11 follows the general chronological outline of Genesis and the opening chapters of Exodus and beyond.
- Last week we saw the early life of Moses. We ended with the events of the Passover, when the destroyer passed over the Israelites as God poured out judgment on the Egyptians by the death of their firstborn children.
- That night signals the beginning of the end of Israel's time in Egypt and triggers the exodus which will mark the beginning of today's passage.
- So let's look at vs. 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. (Hebrews 11:29)

- Last week we talked about what makes a sacrament a sacrament. What distinguishes the Lord's supper from a normal meal and baptism from a bath.
- We talked about three elements: there is the sign, the word or promise, and faith.
- So when you read in 1 Corinthians 11 about people taking communion in an unworthy manner, they are taking it without faith and thus what was intended to represent salvation was instead functioning for judgment. Paul writes that those doing so were getting sick or even dying.

- I think of that as I think of the parting of the Red Sea. The same event represents life to some and death to others. Israel experiences deliverance while the same occasion brings judgment to the Egyptians who lacked faith and the promise of God.
- Throughout chapter 11, we've seen a theme of divine deliverance from death. It began with Abel. But Abel died you say? Yes, but the text emphasizes that though he dies, he still speaks.
- And then we have Enoch, who never experiences death. And then Noah, who is saved from destruction though surrounded by death, then Isaac who is almost sacrificed, but is miraculously delivered, then Moses who is consigned to death as a child by Pharaoh's decree, then the Passover in which Israel was saved while Egypt was judged.
- So death has run through this chapter. And that would have been of particular comfort in a historical context in which persecution is rising.
- The theme of God's delivering His people from or through death must have been an encouragement to a people suffering increasing opposition.
- After all, as we mentioned last week, the resurrection of Christ means that death doesn't have the final word.
- As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15
 - ...*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?* (1 Corinthians 15:54–55)
- Or as the Anglican poet, John Donne writes "Death, thou shalt die."
- If even death doesn't defeat God's will, then what cause do we have to despair, to drift, to disobey?
- Look at that 1 Corinthians 15 reference. Notice the underlined phrase swallowed up.
- That's the same Greek word translated as drowned here in Hebrews.
- Its translated elsewhere as devour as in 1 Peter 5:8
 - *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* (1 Peter 5:8)
- So Egypt is not only drowned, but swallowed up and devoured by the sea.
- Whereas in contrast, Israel walks through as if on dry land.
- The author pulls that right out of Exodus 14:22
 - *And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.* (Exodus 14:22)
- This is one of those little details that really makes the narrative pop.
- There are all kinds of attempts to de-mysticize the parting of the Red Sea. To suggest some sort of naturalistic explanation like a low tide or something. But none of those would account for the dry land. The only explanation is miraculous divine intervention.
- Yes, most assuredly God used natural forces like the wind to accomplish His will, but He uses those natural forces in a supernatural manner. That's the point.
- This isn't a mere working of natural law, this isn't the work of creation, this is the work of creation's Creator bending and flexing the laws of nature to His will for the glory of His name and the good of His people.
- As we read about in vs. 3
 - *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.* (Hebrews 11:3)
- That same sovereign word that spoke creation into existence, now speaks to the winds and the seas to do His bidding.
- So consider the narrative of Exodus. The Lord has poured out his plagues upon Egypt.

- Ten plagues total, each aimed at a particular God that the Egyptians worshiped. In other words, the plagues were not random acts of destruction chosen arbitrarily from a hat; they were a divine dismantling of Egypt's every confidence. Yahweh was not merely defeating Pharaoh's army—He was demonstrating that every god Egypt trusted was powerless before Him.
- So, with the final plague, the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh finally relents and lets Israel go. And remember how that corresponds to the promise God had made to Abram centuries prior:
 - *Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. (Genesis 15:13–14)*
- Remember that this is how Joseph could make mention of the Exodus hundreds of years before it occurred because He believed God's promise to his great-grandfather.
- So Egypt finally relents and let's Israel go. And even the detail about great possessions is accomplished as Israel plunders the Egyptians.
- So Israel leaves, but soon afterwards God hardens Pharaoh's heart. His judgments against Egypt are not yet exhausted so the Lord entices Pharaoh to chase after Israel. Why? Because though Pharaoh has been stripped of his glory, he's not yet undone. His heart is still heart. He's still mired in pride. A stony heart that exalts itself to the heavens will soon find that heart weighing him down to the depths of the abyss.
- So Egypt catches up to Israel on the banks of the Red Sea.
- Israel is caught between a proverbial rock and a hard place, between an angry evil king and an impassable sea. Without a strategy, without a hope...except of course, the only hope that matters.
- So Israel does what she always does in the Exodus account. She complains, she grumbles.
- BTW, that's an important detail. Earlier in the book, in Hebrews 3 and 4, we saw an emphasis on how that first generation failed to enter the promised land because of disbelief. Because of complaining and grumbling.
- But here the emphasis isn't on the disbelief, but the faith. This should be a comfort to us. How often we complain, we grumble, we disbelieve, and yet God is gracious and kind toward us.
- There are at least 10 discernible times when Israel complains in disbelief and yet God is patient. This is not to justify our disbelief or disobedience, but it should be a comfort to us as we struggle in various ways.
- Like the father in Mark's gospel, we should cry out, I believe, help my unbelief. Yes, our faith is small, but our God is not.
- So despite the fact that Israel mumbles and moans, God delivers. He tells Israel in Exodus 14:14
 - *The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. (Exodus 14:14)*
- I love to imagine Moses coming back to the people and saying. Alright guys, quiet down. I've talked to YHWH and we've got a plan. Here it is. We are going to do...nothing. We're gonna play the quiet game.
- Now, this doesn't mean that this is always the solution. I've had people quote this to me in a very pietistic sense as if it means that trusting the Lord means letting go and letting God.
- Don't fight for your marriage. Don't rebuke your child. Don't discipline the errant brother. Don't get involved in culture wars or politics. Just sit back and watch what the Lord is doing.
- He's fighting for you so you can just take a nap.

- Yes, if you are in the midst of one of the most dramatic moments in redemptive history and God explicitly tells you, don't do anything, I've got this, then by all means, don't do anything. But for most of us, the advice is more like Philippians 2:12-13
 - *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* (Philippians 2:12-13)
- Notice, we have a role, we have a responsibility, we have an obligation, but all of the credit and glory ultimately goes to God because all of the empowerment and enablement comes from God. He is the one who works in us both the will and the work.
- So, trust is always the prescribed posture. There is never a situation in which trust in the sovereignty and goodness of the Lord isn't the answer. But trust doesn't entail inactivity. God's providence isn't an excuse for passivity, but rather what empowers our boldness.
- Yes, trust the Lord with your health, but also pray and seek medical help. Yes, trust the Lord for politics, but also pray and study the issues and vote. Yes, trust the Lord for your friend's salvation, but pray and share the gospel with her. Yes, trust the Lord for your marriage, but pray and repent of sin and get help.
- Sometimes faith means being still and silent, but sometimes it means marching around a city or hiding some spies. Faith means trusting and obeying whatever God commands in that particular situation.
- Faith isn't the absence of action, its the fuel that empowers our action as we'll see in the next two accounts. Let's look at vs. 30.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. (Hebrews 11:30)

- Again, understanding this story assumes a certain familiarity with the OT account from the book of Joshua.
- Immediately after crossing the Jordan and entering the promised land, Israel comes to Jericho which is maybe a 2-3 hour walk from the river.
- And there the LORD once again desires to demonstrate His superiority and sovereignty so He determines to deliver the city through miraculous and absurd means.
- We read about it in Joshua 6:2-5
 - *And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."* (Joshua 6:2-5)
- Notice, the LORD says this to Joshua. I can only imagine the subsequent conversation from Joshua to the elders of Israel.
- Remember, this is the first battle in the promised land. They had been wandering for 40 years because their parents had refused to fight so they've been waiting for this day their entire lives and Joshua comes and says, alright, I've got a battle plan. This is what we're going to do. You

won't need your sword, but you will need a fitbit, because we're going to powerwalk the city while tootin our horns.

- At the Red Sea, God says, don't do anything. Just be quiet and watch which seems like crazy advice. Well, this is just as silly of a strategy and yet the silliness is the point. It's a comedy of the absurd in order to highlight God's sovereignty and man's inability to possess the promise apart from God's providence.
- As God had defeated Egypt in a way which stripped her alleged gods of all of their alleged glory, so God strips Israel of any pretense of self-sufficiency and demonstrates that her deliverance is tied completely to her dependency.
- If the author of Hebrews is looking for examples that illustrate ...*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*...he would have been hard-pressed to find a better example than Jericho.
- Just as there is no naturalistic explanation for the parting of the Red Sea and crossing on dry land, so there is no obvious human explanation for why marching around a city blowing horns would cause a well-secured wall to fall.
- Even if you say that the walls fell because of an earthquake, then you have God announcing the earthquake 7 days in advance so you don't really avoid the implications of His sovereignty.
- The point is that faith directs the attention away from the visible wall and visible army and visible circumstances and focuses it on the invisible power of the invisible God.
- Faith sees through the façade of the supremacy of the circumstance. It sees that insurmountable odds aren't actually insurmountable. Again, if even death doesn't have the final word, then what do we have to fear ultimately?
- What situation are you facing that is more consequential than death, more decisive than death, more final than death?
- As Paul writes in Romans 8:
 - *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38–39)
- Don't just gloss over that. Soak in it. Sit in it. Think about it.
- What possible hardship are you facing that isn't covered by "anything else in all creation"?
- And, again, consider how this might have spoken to the context of the first-century audience reading this book. As they're being persecuted, this is a reminder of the utter supremacy of God and His willingness to fight for His people.
- Ultimately, the tactical strategy of the Jews at Jericho wasn't a parade, but rather a reliance on the promises of God. They marched and played because of the authority of God's word. That was the strategy.
- And that's our same strategy today. Whatever battle we find raging in our lives, the true war is the fight to hear and hold to the promises of God. That's what distinguishes folly from wisdom, presumption from trust.
- To believe that it is better to suffer than to sin.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 31.

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

- If the example of Jericho was one of the more obvious examples of the principle of faith, the inclusion of Rahab is a bit more enigmatic.

- For one, she's one of only two women mentioned in Hebrews 11, though next week we'll see a reference to women generically. But even more to the point, she's a Gentile and a prostitute.
- Now, consider the effect her inclusion might have had on these first-century Jewish Christians. As Chrysostom notes, the rhetorical effect of including Rahab would have hit pretty hard.
- If even a Gentile harlot believed, what possible excuse do you have?
- After all, do you want to be more faithless than a Canaanite prostitute?
- But there are a couple of reasons why the author might have seen fit to include her.
- First, she's not just any woman, she is the great-great grandmother of King David and thus the great great great great and another 10-15 greats grandmother of Jesus.
- So her one little act of faithful obedience has literal cosmic significance.
- Likewise, we have no idea how one act of faith on our part can change the trajectory of our family or our church or our culture.
- Second, notice how her actions are described. She gave a friendly welcome to the spies.
- If you were going to sum up that action with one word, a good one to choose would be hospitality and consider how that relates to the example from the previous chapter.
 - *But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.* (Hebrews 10:32-34)
- And in chapter 13, we'll read this:
 - *Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.* (Hebrews 13:1-3)
- So Rahab is a type showing what it means to show hospitality. And to understand a bit more what she represents, we need to make sure we remember the story.
- We need to back up to before the walls of Jericho fall. Israel sends out spies into the promised land and these spies come to Jericho and meet Rahab. Rather than turning them in to the king, she instead hides them.
- Notice how this corresponds to the story of Moses who parents hid him in defiance of the king.
- And why does she hide them?
- Let's let her explain. Joshua 2:8-11
 - *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, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. 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. 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..."* (Joshua 2:8-11)
- So why does she hide them?
- Because she's heard of the LORD. The word has spread and she knows that He has promised the land to Israel. She hears the word of the Lord and believes it. As verse 6 says, she believes that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.
- So she believes. And that faith leads to action.
- We see that in James 2 which says:

- *And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (James 2:25)*
- As we see there, justifying faith is justified by works. In other words, works become a litmus test to the legitimacy of faith.
- And think about the implication of this act on her part. Not only does she defy her king, but she rejects her identity as a Jerichoan in order to identify with Israel. She is willing to leave her own society and culture to align herself with the people of God, ultimately being joined in marriage and becoming a part of the messianic lineage.
- To use the language of Hebrews 13, she is willing to go outside the camp to bear the reproach associated with obedience. She risks her very life on the confidence that He is who He says and will do what He has promised.
- And think about the concept of risk inherent in this. In the previous two accounts, there was a promise. God would deliver Israel from the Egyptians. God would deliver Jericho to Israel. God's word had promised as much.
- But Rahab didn't have a particular promise. Instead she believes in who God is and what He can do and therefore believes that the city will be delivered so she banks on the assumption that He will be merciful and gracious to her.
- Now, think about how compelling that would have been for the first-century readers who also are not promised deliverance from the persecution. God hasn't promised that they won't go to prison or even won't die. But He has promised them that any suffering is worth it.
- And think about how similar their context is to Rahab as they are being called to identify with God's people over and above their loyalty to their Jewish or Roman roots.
- Roman Christians who are perhaps being tempted to turn in their fellow church members in order to receive leniency from the governing authorities. Or who are tempted to choose their Jewish identity over their Christian identity.
- The story of Rahab would have served as a powerful corrective to that temptation, a vivid example of how faith in God's word is more substantial than our heritage or history. Our union with Christ and His people is the substantial reality around which our lives are to revolve.
- So what do we see this morning? That God delivers his people and destroys an army by parting a sea. He defeats a walled city by trumpets and horns and a Gentile prostitute.
- What do these three vignettes have in common? Three stories, three seemingly impossible situations, one common thread: God and His word can be trusted, even when doing so seems absurd.
- And that's good news because He has chosen to make disciples of all nations using imperfect and weak men and women like you and me.
- As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1
 - *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:27–29)*
- Our circumstances aren't sovereign, God is. Cancer isn't sovereign, the economy isn't sovereign, depression isn't sovereign, addiction isn't sovereign, sin isn't sovereign, fear isn't sovereign.
- But Christ is. And Christ is better. Let's pray.

Communion

- Fence table

- As we prepare to partake, I want to draw out an implication of our passage as it relates to communion.
- I want you to think of the absurdity of the meal.
- Human reason devoid of faith says, this is only bread and wine and a tiny portion at that. But faith says, we are spiritually partaking of the body and blood of Christ by virtue of His promise.
- As Calvin notes, God stoops to accommodate Himself to our weaknesses by giving us such signs.
- As silly as it might seem to march around a city and blow a horn as a military strategy, so it seems silly to think that in eating this, we are partaking of grace and yet faith sees through the absurdity and finds the promise and rests in that.
- So as you partake this morning, I want to encourage you to just consider the promise.
- Christ says, this bread is my body given for you and this cup is my blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.
- This isn't only bread and wine, but a sign, a sacrament, a promise.
- So take a second and examine your heart, exalt the grace of God, and let's partake together with expectation.
- On the night...