

Faith that Sets You Free

Hebrews 11:29

Halifax: 3 December 2023

Introduction:

Today we have yet another example—a very powerful one I might add—about what faith does in the lives of God’s people.

- In case you have not been with us for this series, we are going through Hebrews and are now in chapter 11.
- Until now, all of the examples we have looked at have been pretty much of individuals, but to some extent last week and definitely this week, we have an example of the entire nation of Israel (which was probably 1.5 to 2 million persons at this time).
 - For those of you who are not familiar, Israel was the nation that God chose to bring Jesus Christ, God’s eternal Son, into the world in human flesh.
 - God marvellously preserved Israel as His people until Jesus came, and then He sent those among them who believed to proclaim the good news in all the world.

The world needed saving because we are all estranged from God by sin.

- Not only does our sin cause us to reject God, but it also causes Him to reject us.
- As the righteous judge of all the earth, He will allow no injustice to stand.
 - He sent Jesus Christ His Son to offer Himself as a sacrifice for His people’s sins.
 - The good news for all nations is that whoever believes in Him will not be destroyed under God’s eternal judgment, but will be shown mercy.
 - Every person who believes will be pardoned and restored to God.
 - Have you believed? Do you believe? Are you trusting in Christ for forgiveness?

The passage we are looking at today shows us a key time in Israel’s history.

- It happened over 3,500 years ago—about 1,500 years before Christ came.
- God had promised that He would take Israel and preserve them as His people, and that a Son who would bless the world with salvation from sin would come from them.
 - Over 400 years before, He had told Abraham, the father of their nation, that He would multiply him by giving him many descendants, and that they would be enslaved in Egypt, but that He would bring them out with a mighty hand and give them the land of Canaan where He would govern them in righteousness as His own people. God would continue to reveal Himself to them and correct them until Jesus came. Then people from all nations would turn to God.
- God raised up Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt.
 - He went to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, but Pharaoh refused to let them go.
 - The LORD sent devastating plagues upon Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to let them go, but Pharaoh’s heart grew more and more obstinate. Finally, with the tenth plague where all the firstborn males in Egypt were killed by an angel in a single night,
 - Pharaoh sent Israel away.

But the verse we are looking at today speaks about what happened just after Pharaoh released them.

- We read about it in Exodus 14 a few minutes ago.
- Pharaoh changed his mind and decided to go after them.

- No doubt he did not want to lose all of that slave labour, but scripture tells us that the main thing was his pride—he could not bear to admit defeat before the LORD.
- As we read, God led Israel to a place where they were actually hemmed in by the land when the Egyptians came with their horses and chariots.
 - The Egyptians were coming down the path they had traversed, and there was no outlet for them with the hills and the Red Sea blocking and shutting them in.
 - Even if they could outrun them, they had no way to escape. They were greatly distressed.
 - But Moses told them to stand still and see the salvation of the LORD.
- Then God parted the waters of the Red Sea and commanded them to cross between two walls of water on the dry seabed.
 - Imagine that! It took faith to do that.
 - William Lindsay explains: “Convinced by the miracles Moses had wrought, and especially by the salvation of their firstborn from the stroke which desolated Egypt, they believed God, and with unhesitating step they marched forward into the sea. And Jehovah, in whom they trusted, parted the waters before them, so that they passed through on dry land, with walls of water towering above them on either side. What a bold attempt! What a marvellous result! What but God’s promise could crown it with success?”

Let me read the text to you now.

- It is only one verse. Hebrews 11:29.
- This is the word of God:

Hebrews 11:29: By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

May God be praised for giving us His word.

- It is given for our help.
 - The story is not complicated.
 - Israel was hemmed in by with the Egyptians in pursuit. Moses called them to look to the Lord for deliverance. They did, and He opened up the Red Sea. By faith, they went across on the dry land between walls of water. The Egyptians pursued them and were drowned.
 - It is a marvellous story. It is not hard to understand.
 - So we are going to focus on what we can learn from this event.
 - The purpose of the event itself for Israel was to bring them out of bondage by faith so they could be established as God’s people in Canaan until Jesus came.
 - But this event is also designed by God not only to grant them temporal deliverance as God’s people so His redemptive plan could continue...
 - But also to instruct both them and us about the way of salvation from sin by Jesus Christ that we might be eternally established in His kingdom of glory.
 - It is, in other words, typological.
 - Let’s consider what it says to us.

I. Hemmed in! Trapped! No way to escape! Desperate!

A. Have you ever felt that way?

1. That you are in bondage?

- That you cannot be what you ought to be—what you are truly meant to be?
- That the beautiful person you'd like to be who truly loves other people and serves them is impossible for you?
 - Instead of gratitude, there is complaining.
 - Instead of enjoying the good things of this world—food, wine, sex—you are in bondage to them; they control you instead of you them.
- You see the laziness—when you ought to work and you don't.
 - You know that you ought to serve others, but instead you turn to foolish pastimes—the internet, frivolous things, indulgence, etc.
 - You see the excuse making and the cover up—even the lies.
- You see the bitterness that makes you cold and angry—touchy and full of complaining and hostility.
 - You see the envy that keeps you from rejoicing when others succeed.
- You see the fears that paralyse you and keep you from serving God and others.

2. You see that you are part of a world that is in bondage.

- A world where nobody really cares about others and where God is not loved.
 - Even in the church, you see that it is too often the same.
 - People that you trusted disappoint you; people that were supposed to take care of you abandon you; you see cursing and bitterness toward God instead of praise; you see selfishness instead of service.

3. And there is no way of escape.

- You cannot change.
- The doctors and philosophers and priests of the world cannot change you nor can they change the world. The marriage counsellors all seem to get divorces and the child psychologists all have children with serious problems.
 - Too often, this is even the case with ministers in the church.
 - It is a desperate and hopeless situation.

B. Perhaps you are one who has been blessed to see the root of the problem.

1. You have come to see that the problem is worse than you thought at first.

- We are shut up to bondage because we rebelled against our Maker.
- We are under His wrath and curse and we are destined for judgment.
- You see the pride in you that keeps you from serving Him and worshipping Him—it's as if you are competing with Him.

2. But in seeing this, you also see that there is forgiveness with God.

- You realise why Jesus came—it was to bear our sins that we might be forgiven—to be punished in our place that we might be restored to God.
- So you come to Him to be cleansed of your sin—what we saw last week as illustrated by the Passover... a sacrifice in your place.

- He is the one God sent to take our punishment, and God has declared that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.
3. And so, like Israel, you have come to Christ in faith to be pardoned, and you have set out to serve God from now on.
- You believe His promise and now you can come to God.
 - He has pardoned you.
 - You have said to the Lord, “From now on, I will follow you. From now on, I will live for you.”

TRANS> But what is the reality of the situation?

C. You find that Satan and the world do not want to let you go. They come after you.

1. Satan cannot make you sin, but he can keep presenting to you those sins that you find most enticing.
 - He can package them to make them look so rewarding, so desirable.
 - He can lie to you and tell you that you can't help but give in.
 - He can stir up the world to come after you and tempt you at your weakest point.
 - He plays us by relentlessly enticing us right in our areas of weakness.
2. Satan can also orchestrate and stir up persecution—
 - again, aiming at us in areas that he believes would be most disturbing to us and must likely to succeed in turning us away from the LORD.
3. Keep in mind, of course, that God carefully regulates what Satan does.
 - He actually uses Satan's work to our advantage if we are among the elect because it strengthens us in our areas of weakness.
 - But if we give in for a time, we may also bring many sorrows upon ourselves like Peter and David did when Peter gave in under threat of persecution and David under enticement.
 - For those who are not true believers, Satan's temptations draw them permanently away and they die in their sins.
 - And sadly, many believers live in bondage to certain sins—they are shut up to them so that their walk is weak, their joy is lost, and their ministry is ineffectual.
 - They still go through the motions, but some of them are not even true believers—others are hampered believers who go in and out of repentance and never really move on in their walk.

D. The Lord has been burdening me of late with a great awareness of my own bondage and of the church's bondage.

1. We have come to Christ for forgiveness, but we need to see that we are hemmed in by our sin—Satan and world are in hot pursuit.
 - Israel saw Pharaoh and his chariots.
 - We need to see Satan and world refusing to let us go.

2. Paul the Apostle was certainly mindful of this in himself and in the church.
 - In Romans 7, we have these words, Rom 7:21-24: **I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?**
3. We must see that there is no escape but from the Lord.
 - You are shut up with no way to escape... but one.

II. The LORD calls you to faith. He says “Look to me and be saved.”

- Not the initial pardon and justification, but ongoing deliverance from bondage.
- A. He wants us to be restored to that dependency on Him from which we fell in the garden.
 1. What better way to teach us to look to Him than to put us in situations where we see that we are shut up to bondage and unable escape without His aid?
 - Satan is pursuing us, the world is pursuing us, and we are being drawn—we are giving in. We are shut in by our own pride and selfishness.
 - We need to see this, the way Israel did when Pharaoh and Satan’s armies were coming and they were closed in by mountains and sea. We are shut up to our lusts and fears and pride.
 2. As one who is shut up in bondage to sin, you must put yourself entirely in the Lord’s hands to deliver you.
 - a. Who could be more reliable than the LORD?
 - How reliable He has been!
 - For Israel, He sent the ten plagues just as He said.
 - He controls the forces of nature.
 - He can move mountains.
 - He always acts with wisdom.
 - b. But best of all, He has made His commitment to bless us clear.
 - He had made promises to us and covenants with us.
 - He has moved heaven and earth to bring salvation to us.
 - He has sent His Son to redeem us.
 - Will He forsake us now?
 - c. Thus Paul answered his question about who would deliver him from the bondage he found himself in:
 - Rom 7:25: **I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.**
 - B. See how the LORD liberates us.
 - He sets us free from bondage even though for us it was impossible.
 1. What a grand illustration we have of God’s grace that sets us free in our text.
 - **By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*...**

- Israel was entirely hemmed in and to their amazement, Moses stretched out his staff (a picture of Christ being lifted up) and the sea opened!
 - He made a way of escape when there was no way of escape.
 - 2. Is this not what He has done for us in the gospel?
 - We were shut in by our sin with no way to make atonement. Now amount of pleading, or tears, or sacrifices would do.
 - But He sent His Son to open the way of forgiveness.
 - His gracious Son went to the cross to bear our sins—to take our place that we might be set free.
 - 3. And now, when we find Satan and the world pursuing us and ourselves being played by them... will He not liberate us again?
- C. What will you do?
1. If you want to go back to Egypt, fine! Go back, and we will see what will become of you!
 2. But if you want to go with God, leave it to Him!
 - That is not passivity, that is giving yourself over to Him, crying out to Him as Paul did to deliver you from this body of death.
 - Put yourself entirely in His hands—between those walls of water—in the way that only He can make.
 - It means pursuing Him earnestly in faith—being steadfast in the word and prayer—not just attending church, but being diligent about it.
 - You who are not—what are you relying on?
 - Whatever are you relying on?
 - No wonder your walk with God is dried up.
 - No wonder you are being enticed by idolatry that changes the truth of God into a lie.
 - No wonder that sin has such a grip on you.
 - My brothers and sisters, look to the Lord and be saved!

III. How beautiful, how complete is God's liberation!

- A. He opened a way where there was none and you are able to walk in it.
1. He keeps you by His grace.
 - He does the impossible.
 - He keeps the walls up that if left to themselves would close in on you.
 - What I mean is that He preserves you in His way that you would not be able to continue in without His preservation.
 - And you learn that this is true—that if you step away from dependence on Him through meaningful prayer and use of the word, you are unable to go on with Him—
 - You are no longer going on in faith.
 2. And all the while as you walk with Him, you have sweet communion with Him.
 - You grow in your knowledge of Him and of His grace.

- You see His beauty and His love.
- You see His greatness and His power.
- You see His faithfulness.
- You see His holiness.
- You will grow in your worship.

B. And look at what He does to Satan and his minions.

1. He puts a barrier between them and you so that they cannot harm you.
 - That is shown in Exodus where the cloudy pillar moves behind Israel, between them and the pursuing Egyptians—giving Israel light and them darkness.
 - They are restrained because you are walking with God in faith, looking to do His will by His grace—keeping up communion with Him.
 - They are not able to get at you.
- But the LORD also does something else to them.
2. He destroys them.
 - Their assumption is that if you can walk through the sea on dry land, they can do it too.
 - They think they can find liberty and peace and prosperity if you can and that they can do it even better.
 - You can go to glory by trusting in God, and they can go to glory by trusting in themselves—doing it the way they want.
 - The rude awakening comes that they cannot do any of these things the way you do—by God’s enablement—by faith that trusts in His enablement.
 - Yes, the day comes, when, as in the Exodus account, the sea closes in on them and they perish in the way.
 - They realise that although the Lord sustained them to go in their own way for a long time, He will cease.
3. The illustration of the Red Sea crossing helps us to see how presumptuous the ungodly really are.
 - How could it possibly turn out well for them to go into a situation in which God had held the waters back in a miraculous way so His people could escape?
 - Would He continue to hold them back for them too?
 - That would be preposterous!
 - What’s more, they had already seen ten plagues that God had sent to them.
 - What could they possibly expect now?
 - But you see, that is how the wicked are in their pride and unbelief.
 - God is preserving them and they go on in their rebellion against Him and in their denial of Him as if He will keep on preserving them forever.
 - The Lord explains that He only sustains them for a time that they might repent or that He might be glorified when He does bring them to ruin.

- Many unbelievers would say that if God were to make Himself plain as He is alleged to have done with the plagues, they would be among the first to believe.
 - But that is a grand delusion on their part.
 - The problem with ungodliness is not a lack of evidence, but sinful opposition to God and pride that wants to make its own way without His help or any acknowledgement of Him.

Conclusion: So the outcome is this: God's people are set free by faith while the wicked perish in their unbelief.

- **Hebrews 11:29: By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*,**
- ***whereas* the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.**
- You simply cannot go on without the LORD.