

# Faith Before the Walls of Jericho

Hebrews 11:30

*Halifax: 7 January 2024*

## **Introduction:**

Today, we are resuming our sermon series in the book of Hebrews.

- We are currently going slowly through chapter 11.
  - The first 10 chapters of Hebrews present to us the object of our faith: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came as a priest to atone for His people's sins.
    - It is by trusting in Him that we obtain salvation.
  - At the end of chapter 10, we are exhorted to believe.
  - And then chapter 11 is full of examples of how faith works in practice.
    - I thought it would be good to slow down here because the mere mention of these Old Testament examples was sufficient for these Hebrew believers that Hebrews is written to, but many of us are not so familiar with these narratives.
    - I hope all of you will become more familiar with them through these sermons, and most importantly, that your faith will be strengthened by looking at them.
      - And I hope and pray that you will be stimulated to strengthen your faith by regular reading of these Old Testament accounts.
    - They are written for us.

The last sermon I preached from Hebrews 11, before we took a break from Hebrews, was on Hebrews 11:29.

- It may be contrasted with the example we are looking at today, which is Hebrews 11:30.
- The background of these verses is the same.
  - God was bringing the nation He had chosen to be His people out of slavery in Egypt to a land of their own that they might be governed by Him.
    - God had called them and promised to preserve them that they might be the nation from which Christ, the Saviour of the world, would come.
    - His plan was to give them ordinances of worship with a temple, a priesthood, sacrifices, and holy days so that they could be forgiven and restored to the living God from whom the whole world had been estranged by sin.
    - These ordinances of worship would set forth, by rituals, how Christ, the ultimate priest, would offer the ultimate sacrifice that would save them and all the people that God would call from sin.
      - God was teaching them (and providing lessons through them for the nations who would come to Him after Christ came) to trust in Him to make them His own people.
- In Hebrews 11:29, we are taught that they had faith to be delivered from bondage that they might serve God in His kingdom. I entitled that sermon "Faith that sets you free."
  - I spoke about how our sin can make us feel quite helpless and how we have to look to the Lord, in faith believing His promise, to deliver us from bondage.

- And in Hebrews 11:30, we are taught how they had faith to enter into and take the land that God had promised them despite the things that stood in their way—symbolised by the walls of Jericho.

Listen now as I read these two verses to you from God’s holy Word.

- Remember that God’s word is given to us that we might believe—it is given to strengthen our faith that we might be able to serve God faithfully.
- This is the word of God.

**Hebrews 11:29-30: By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. <sup>29</sup> By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.**

There we end the reading of God’s Word.

- May He be praised and honoured.

To summarise, these verses teach us that we must trust God to deliver us from bondage to sin, Satan, and the rebellious world (v. 29 from last time), and v. 30 (today’s verse), that by faith we are able to overcome all opposition to establish God’s righteous kingdom in this world.

- May the Lord develop our faith as those who are called to establish His righteous kingdom in the world today despite all kinds of opposition.

**I. I want to begin by showing you that “the walls of Jericho” represent for us what stands in the way of the advancement of God’s kingdom.**

A. First, let me tell you about the literal walls of Jericho.

1. Almost 3,500 years ago, God, having brought His people Israel out of slavery in Egypt, commanded them to establish a righteous kingdom for Him in the land of Canaan.
  - a. They were to be a nation among the nations that was reconciled to God.
    - He would preserve them to be the nation that would bring Jesus the Saviour into the world, and they were to keep the ordinances that He gave them at that time—they were to obey Him and to trust Him.
    - God would be their King in this land, and the ceremonial law with its sacrifices would show by rituals how God forgives sins by the sacrifice and death of a substitute—ultimately it would be Christ on the cross.
    - They were to live in the world as God’s people.
  - b. But in order to establish this righteous kingdom where they would live under God, they had to first clear the land of its current inhabitants—the Canaanites.
    - Many people are offended when they hear what God commanded Israel to do: remove the Canaanites from the land. They were to execute them all, men, women, and children.
      - Many Christians struggle with this and are embarrassed by it, but we ought not to be.
    - God ordered this, as He says, to punish these nations for the sin that He had allowed to grow up to maturity in these people for four centuries.

- He always restrains sin, but He did not restrain it so much in these nations. He left them to freely go their own way.
    - Over the years from the time of Noah when the world started over with God as their redeemer, these nations had gradually turned to idols, to gross immorality, and to violence.
    - Their idols were demons who led them to live in defiance of God.
    - They even offered their own children as sacrifices to these idols.
  - If God had not specially called Israel and diligently restrained them from sin, they would have been just like these nations—God said so.
    - The favour He showed to them was completely undeserved—it was all of grace.
    - God says plainly that He showed mercy to them for no reason in them. He said that He can show mercy to whom He will.
      - He could have justly treated them the same way that He treated the Canaanites and there would have been no injustice done.
      - They deserved to be wiped out just like the Canaanites.
      - That is what people do not accept when they are offended by this.
        - Once we see that God has shown incredible undeserved kindness to His people, we can no longer quarrel that after years of patience, He finally gave the Canaanites the punishment they fully deserved.
        - A judge who patiently waits and finally sentences the offenders to what they deserve has done no wrong.
- That was a deliberate digression. But now back to the main point...
- The Lord called the nation to whom He had chosen to show mercy to wipe out all the Canaanites, on account of their wickedness in that land,
    - and to themselves live in that land as His people, trusting Him, obeying His commandments, serving Him, worshipping Him, and receiving His forgiveness that was promised to them.
    - But conquering those nations was not an easy thing to do.
2. The walls of Jericho were the first great barrier that Israel had to overcome when they came to take the land of Canaan.
- a. It was a fortified city, surrounded by great walls designed to resist invasion.
    - It was so formidable that it was a major factor that led ten of the twelve men who had gone to spy out the land forty years prior to declare the conquest impossible.
      - The people, hearing the bad report, concurred, and were sentenced by the Lord to wander in the wilderness for forty years until another generation took their place.
  - b. And the truth is, it was impossible for Israel without military training and without armour or machinery to conquer apart from the Lord's intervention.

- The Lord intended it to be like this so they would have to rely on Him, and so that all would know that the victory was by His hand.
- B. Now the church has a much greater God-given task with more formidable walls.
1. Our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things that He has commanded.
    - Their opposition to God must be transformed to glad submission to Him.
    - Our Lord Jesus has called us (Acts 26:18) **“to open their eyes, *in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.*”**
    - We are called to do nothing less than (2 Cor 10:5) **cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.**
    - As J. Gresham Machen said, “The Christian cannot be satisfied so long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations but also all of human thought.”
  2. The walls of opposition are mighty indeed!
    - The human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.
    - Sin and rebellion against God are so deeply rooted in every human heart that it causes it to put up every kind of resistance it can marshal.
      - It will avoid and ignore God and His call.
      - It will inflame itself with unwarranted bitterness based on unjust accusations against Him.
      - It will manufacture and serve false and twisted versions of God—idols—to avoid serving the true God.
      - It will even deny that there is a God—which is honestly absolute madness—which it tries to support by gathering others who make the same denial.
      - It will give its soul over to covetousness, pride, sexual immorality, violence, or even self-made moralism.
    - The human heart will band together with others to put out arguments and defences against the true God.
      - It will crucify the very one who was sent to save us from our sins.
      - It will do anything but repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ that it might be reconciled to God.
    - These are the walls of Jericho that the church faces in advancing God’s kingdom today.
  3. Jesus called them the gates of Hades.
    - They are indeed formidable—much more formidable than the physical gates of Jericho.
      - Like the walls of Jericho, we must depend on God to break them down!

- Jesus declared confidently that the gates of Hades will not be able to prevail against the church when He goes forth with us by the power of His Spirit.
  - As we saw in Revelation last week, when He opens a door for His gospel, no one can shut it.
- In the first century, the Jewish and Roman opposition to the gospel was very fierce.
  - The Jews who crucified Christ were like the Israelites in Moses' day who refused to enter Canaan because of their rebellion and unbelief.
  - The Romans were like the Canaanites who refused to be conquered by the gospel.
- The early church had to advance the gospel against this opposition.
  - When the early church went forward with Christ, they did conquer them, just as Joshua conquered Canaan. And we continue to do so.
    - But whenever we are unfaithful, we do not advance the kingdom because the Lord withdraws His power for a time to chasten us—just as He withdrew His power from Israel when they were unfaithful.
    - At such time, the advance of His kingdom is slowed and almost halted at times, just as it was for Israel again and again until reformation comes.

TRANS> It is only by faith that we are able to bring down the walls of Jericho today and bring the world to God through Christ.

## **II. And now I want you to see that the method that the Lord has appointed for bringing down the walls of Jericho also requires faith.**

- A. Let's begin with the faith that was required for bringing down the literal walls of Jericho in Joshua's day.
1. It would have been one thing if the Lord had given them all kinds of armour and military machinery—or had given them some kind of amazing strategy.
    - But instead, He gave them means (or a method) for bringing down those mighty walls that could never succeed—apart from divine intervention.
  2. We read about the means that God appointed—it must have made the men of Jericho laugh, even while trembling because they knew what God did at Egypt.
    - Joshua 6:3-5: **“You shall march around the city, all *you* men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. <sup>4</sup> And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. <sup>5</sup> It shall come to pass, when they make a long *blast* with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him.”**
    - How was this supposed to work?
      - Only by God's mighty hand.
      - The language employed tells us that in addition to the miracle of the walls falling—they fell flat! Some even think the ground swallowed them, but in

any case, there was not a great pile of rubble—they were able to march right into the city and take it.

3. Israel's faith is exhibited in using the means that God gave them.
  - They did not dig a trench, they did not build battering rams, they simply marched around the city behind the priests who then blew the trumpets.
  - They fully trusted God and He brought the walls down.
- B. Today, faith is required as the means that God has appointed for advancing the kingdom of Christ.
  - It was needed for the Hebrews to whom Hebrews is written and it is needed for us today.
  - 1. What are the means that He has appointed?
    - Preaching the gospel—what Paul calls, the foolishness of preaching.
      - Paul went around like Jesus did from synagogue to synagogue (the churches of the Jews) and preached the gospel.
      - He also proclaimed the gospel to people he met when he was opposed and arrested—even to rulers and kings.
      - He called all men everywhere to repent.
    - In addition to this, baptism was appointed. Those who believed were to receive it with their children, looking to Jesus who was crucified and who baptises with the Holy Spirit, for their cleansing signified by the water.
      - They, as Christ commanded, were added to the church that they might observe all that Christ has commanded.
      - Here the ordinances of worship were to be done. Here, prayers were to be offered up for the advance of the kingdom. Here, praises were to be given to God. Here, the gospel was to be declared. Here, the Lord's Supper was to be served each Lord's Day. Here, believers were to be cared for spiritually and physically. Here they were to be accountable and disciplined if they were to go astray. Here, ministers and elders were to be raised up and trained to shepherd and teach the people, and from here they were to be sent out into the world to preach the gospel and also given oversight.
  - 2. But how could this change the rebellious heart of man and bring him to God through faith in Christ?
    - a. At least there is a connection with the means in that we warn everyone and preach the way of salvation by faith in a Saviour (the Son of God) crucified for sinners.
      - We warn them of the dreadful consequences of refusal and the wonderful rewards of acceptance.
      - The way of salvation by Christ dying for sin is clearly set forth.
      - The changed lives of believers living as God's people in the church demonstrate the power of the gospel.
    - b. There is a connection between these means and the goal of advancing the kingdom, but how could these possibly bring a sinner to the Lord?

- They cannot do that!
  - They cannot save anyone apart from God's intervention.
- Paul frequently refers to this.
  - He says: 2Co 4:6-7: **For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.**
- What an incredible thing—that God should use clay pots with voices to bring sinners into His glorious kingdom!
  - Such a method could not succeed without His mighty hand of power.
    - It requires faith in the Lord.

### III. Do we have faith?

A. If we do, we will do what God says.

1. We will stick to simple preaching of the word, sacraments, prayer, godly living, faithfulness in public ordinances.
  - We will make these a priority, and we will endeavour to do them just as God has said.
2. We will look to Him to give the increase—to break down the walls of Jericho before us that His kingdom might conquer and subdue.
3. The world sometimes recognises the power of the gospel more than we do.
  - For too long, modern Christians have been telling the world that we just want to live at peace with them in the world.
    - They know better. They know that God and His kingdom are a threat to them.
    - They know that the Lord calls for nothing less than death to self that they might turn to God for new life in Christ crucified, the Lord of all.
  - We are taking over because Christ our king is taking over the whole world and they had better repent and come to God by Him or they will be miserably destroyed and brought to the pit of hell!
    - Every knee will bow to Him and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.
    - Like the demons that encountered Jesus, they do not want that to happen before the time.
    - But unlike the demons, they could repent and enter the kingdom if only their hearts were not so desperately rebellious that they fiercely refuse God's mercy and do all they can to silence Christians who proclaim the truth.
      - They are glad for our softened message that we just want to get along with everyone—but it is our unfaithfulness and unbelief and it hinders the advance of the gospel.

B. If we do not have faith that the LORD will use us and the means He has appointed to build His church...

1. We will despair of the means that He has appointed.
    - We will not (as it were) march around the walls—again and again even though nothing seems to be happening from it.
    - We will stop our prayers and our diligent preaching of the gospel, concluding that it does not work.
      - Paul says in 2 Cor 2:4-5: **And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>s</sup> that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**
    - Since Covid, I have seen many Christians become slack about attending church.
      - They see no problem with going to church online.
      - They see no problem with living in a place where there is no solid church.
      - They do not diligently observe what God has appointed.
  - What else might we do if our faith becomes weak?
  2. We will embellish the simple means that He has given us.
    - We will add a bit of drama and entertainment in place of preaching.
    - We will focus on social programmes or political reforms instead of the means of grace.
      - Not that these are wrong, but they are not substitutes for spreading the gospel.
  3. Perhaps worst of all, we will compromise in an effort to make the gospel more attractive to unbelievers.
    - We will tone down our doctrine—not talk about hell or about sin, won't call people out for sex outside of marriage or declare that homosexuality is an abomination.
      - We will do what we have done and act like Jesus and His church is no threat to them and their way of life when in fact He has appointed them all to utter destruction unless they repent and believe.
    - Where did we ever get the idea that our message should attract unbelievers?
      - We don't want to attract unbelievers to the church. We want unbelievers to see that they must be converted!
- C. We must remember that it is the LORD who does the saving.
1. We must patiently march around the city for seven days and do it seven times on the seventh day, and He will bring down the walls.
    - What I mean is, we must continue to use the means that He appointed.
    - If we have to go round and round for centuries, we must do it with patience until He fully establishes His kingdom with all under Christ.
  2. The seven days and seven priests and seven rounds on the seventh day remind us that the advancing of the kingdom is His work.
    - The sevens point us to creation when God made the world and then rested on the seventh day—inviting us to enter into His rest (or completion of His work of creation) with joy and blessing.



- Hebrews 3-4 referred to the entry into Canaan as entering into God's rest—it was His work to create a nation for Himself in Canaan, driving out the Canaanites. Those who entered, entered into God's rest.
- And Hebrews 3 & 4 reminded us that there is a rest that remains for the people of God—the rest that comes through the gospel.
  - By the gospel, we bring people into this rest when the gospel conquers them.
- 3. This is the rest that we celebrate every seventh day on the Christian Sabbath.
  - In observing it, we declare that it is *His* saving work completed in us, making us into new creations in Jesus Christ.
  - If you do not repent and believe, you will not enter His rest. You will be cast into the pit with Satan and all who are in league with him.
    - Enter while you may!