

FAITH OVERCOMES THE WORLD

Hebrews 11:29-40

Key Verse: 11:29

"By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned."

There is a geographical division in Hebrews 11. The borderline is the Red Sea. Part I, 11:4-28, deals with fathers of faith who practiced faith as a matter of life and death. As a result, they pleased God and experienced the power of faith. Especially, by faith, they overcame their fatalistic elements of life and gave lifegiving examples of how to live a victorious life. Their faith pleased God. God set each one of these heroes of faith as a pillar in each corner of his salvation work and history. Part II, 11:29-40, is the history of Israel's conquest of the promised land, beginning from crossing the Red Sea. Here, the author deals with fathers of faith who, by faith, fought and conquered the promised land. It is indeed startling to know that the people of Israel, who had been too helpless to move as a result of 430 years of life in captivity, now stood up to fight and conquered the promised land. The people of Israel, who were once slaves, became people of conquest when they depended on God.

I. The acts of faith (29-31)

First, by faith, the people passed through the Red Sea (29). The people of Israel were not at all fighters due to 430 years of slavery in Egypt. But by faith they escaped Egypt and made the Exodus. For now,

they must have felt that they were mighty warriors. Soon they confronted another impossible task. Look at verse 29. "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned." This verse vividly shows that impossible people carried out an impossible task. As we know, until now the Israelites had been slave people who were broken, dispirited and powerless to do anything. It was impossible for the 600,000 Israelites to cross the Red Sea, for it was deep and wide and was flooding violently due to the rainy season. They were too afraid to look at the Red Sea; it made cold sweat break out on their backs.

The 600,000 Israelites could not advance because they were blocked by the Red Sea, and at the same time, they could not retreat because the Egyptian army was chasing them in the rear. They could not fly away because they had no wings. They were in a boundary situation: they had to either surrender or drown. When they heard the sound of the Egyptian chariots, which was like the sound of a speedy whirlwind, they immediately turned to Moses and began to complain, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?...Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone...'" (Ex 14:11,12). They felt like dying when they looked only at their situation.

What could Moses do in this situation? Humanly speaking, he had no way. But in God, he had a way. Moses did not say, "Well, I will think about what I can do," like contemporary leaders. Instead, Moses looked at God and remembered God's promises (Ex 3:12a). Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance

the Lord will bring you today" (Ex 14:13a). How did the people respond?

In this helpless situation, they did not remain stubborn. They responded to Moses' words because they were obedient, and they had no choice. His people, who had felt like dying in fear, began to gain strength when they began to have faith in God through Moses.

When Moses raised his staff and stretched out his hand over the sea as the Lord had commanded, the water was divided into two parts and stood like walls. At that moment, the people could have calculated and said, "What will we do if, out of nowhere, the water falls down upon us and we are drowned?" But they overcame their inner fear, and by faith they put their shaky feet in the Red Sea, and passed through it as on dry land. The people of Israel were slave people. In their slave mentality, they were used to sitting down. They moved as much as they were whipped. But they crossed the Red Sea as on dry land when they heard God's words through Moses.

Verse 29 also teaches us about God. God wanted his people to become strong by overcoming their human conditions by faith. God wanted them to experience the power of faith in God Almighty. God wanted them to cross the Red Sea by faith. God did not let them remain as weaklings permanently. God did not want them to remain as childish or petty people. God wanted them to experience the power of God and to become powerful people. God wanted them to conquer the promised land.

There is a Red Sea in each person's life. If a man remains in despair, looking at his roaring Red Sea, he will become a man of despair and die of despair. He will suffer from all kinds of fear

throughout his lifetime and die in fear. Moreover, he cannot please God, nor can he be a child of God. But if, by faith, he crosses his own Red Sea, he will be called a child of God who pleases God. Let's look at verse 29b. "...but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned." The Egyptians thought, "If these Israelite slaves can pass through the Red Sea unharmed, so can we." So the Egyptians depended on army force and their skill and tried to cross the Red Sea. They all drowned.

Second, the faith that felled the walls of Jericho (30). Here we learn that the power of faith comes from absolute obedience to God's word. Look at verse 30. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days." The fall of Jericho is recorded in Joshua 6:1-20. The Israelites had crossed the Red Sea and come into the promised land at last. They were overjoyed to put their feet on the promised land. But to their surprise, instead of milk and honey in the promised land, there was an invincible fortress full of enemies ready to shoot them down through arrow holes in the walls. It was the well-fortified city of Jericho. They were full of dreams and expectations of the promised land, but it was not the land they had dreamt of. It was nothing but a battleground. Jericho was the first enemy stronghold to conquer. The promised land was not given free of charge. They had to conquer it to possess it.

It was impossible for the Israelites to do battle and conquer the walls of Jericho because they were not disciplined in battle. They had no ladders to climb up the walls. They had to give up.

But they could fell the walls of Jericho when they absolutely obeyed the word of God. God commanded them to march around the city of Jericho once a day in complete silence for six days, and then, on the seventh day, march around it seven times. They were to blow trumpets and shout. What a ridiculous strategy! The strategy sounded as if it would not scare anyone or anything away, not even a pet dog, "Mike." So it was difficult for them to obey. There are many who say after listening to God's word, "It's good for you, but not for me." Such people have no respect for God's word. From God's point of view, they are very disobedient people to God. To our surprise, the Israelites obeyed God's instructions exactly. Then the walls of Jericho fell down flat, making a thunderous sound. Victory was theirs when they absolutely obeyed God's command. If they had not obeyed God's command absolutely, they would have perished. But by faith, when they absolutely obeyed God's command, they won the first victory in the promised land. We learn that the greatest act of faith is to obey God's word absolutely in an impossible situation. Then we can experience God's victory.

Third, from a multitude of slaves into mighty soldiers of God. This event of felling the walls of Jericho changed the people of Israel from a multitude of slaves into mighty soldiers of God. This was a glorious work of God in his people. Through this victory they were convinced that by faith they could conquer the promised land. Through this victory they could say, "God is our commander and he is our banner! He is our victory!" (Ex 17:15).

Fourth, "by faith the prostitute Rahab..." (31). There was one woman whose faith made the conquest of Jericho possible. She was Rahab. The

author of Hebrews regarded the story of Rahab in the Old Testament as an example of faith which could not be omitted. Rahab's story is recorded in Joshua 2:1-24, and its sequel, in Joshua 6:25. When Joshua sent spies to Jericho, Rahab welcomed them even though she was a prostitute in an army camp. She helped the spies escape. This prostitute caused the ruin of her own country. Humanly speaking, she was a national traitor. She was a medley of contradictions. However, in God's history she was a woman of faith and wisdom. She staked her life and future on her faith that God is the Creator God. She believed that God had given the land of Canaan into the hand of Israel. She believed that God is the Creator and Sovereign Ruler of history. She believed that God would do anyway what he had planned to do. She believed that her country was about to be conquered. She lost no time. By faith she could immediately take a stand on God's side. Her act of faith was to stand on God's side at a historical moment.

Rahab's testimony--that God had given the city of Jericho into the hand of Israel--convinced the spies that God was in their midst; and the news enhanced the morale of the undisciplined Israelite soldiers until they were filled with fighting spirit, until they won the victory before fighting. Because of her faith that God is the Creator, she pushed aside other heroines of faith, and was included in the genealogy of Jesus, even though she was a Gentile prostitute.

II. The power of faith (32, 33-40)

Let's read verses 32-34. Here the author emphasizes the great things that God had done through the fathers of faith. How could they do such

great things, which have startled people down through generations whenever we hear about them? Look at verse 32. "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets...." Most of the heroes of faith he mentions are judges who were used by God in the days of the conquest of the promised land.

God's people could not maintain God's blessing because they liked the advanced cultural life of the Canaanites and flowing milk and honey more than God. The times of the Judges were a time when the word of God was rare (1 Sam 3:1), and ungodly people were the absolute majority. But despite their sins and perversion, God raised up judges to deliver them.

When we study these people whom God used, we find one common factor in them: they were all weak people. But their weaknesses were turned to strength when they believed in God. Faith changed them into new men. Faith gave them victory. For example, Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress--a secret place where the enemy Midianites could not see him. Gideon was the youngest son and an escape artist. In addition, he was very fatalistic about his national situation. But an angel of the Lord came to him and said, "Am I not sending you to fight against the Midianites?" When Gideon heard the angel's message, he had many complaints. But when he obeyed God's word, the power of faith began to circulate in his soul, and he became a charismatic leader. He could defeat the Midianites, who were as numerous as swarms of locusts. Gideon won the battle when he obeyed God's word.

Barak was supposed to be the commander-in-chief of the army of Israel when Sisera, the general of a king in Canaan, plotted to invade Israel with 900 chariots. Barak was too afraid to be commander-in-chief. So he said to Deborah, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go" (Jdg 4:8). So Deborah went with him. Barak borrowed the faith of a woman, Deborah. Then he defeated the entire army of Canaanites. May God grant us many Deborahs!

Samson was a macho man of matchless physical strength. His problem was his lustful desire. So Samson enjoyed a foxy woman, Delilah. As a result, his two eyes were plucked out by his enemies. He made God very sorry. He became like a Chinese bear in a circus before the enemy Philistines. Samson was so sorry that he had displeased God. By faith he wanted to please God just one time in his fatalistic situation. He had no way to please God. But he had a way; it was through his crying out in prayer. So he prayed, "O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more..." (Jdg 16:28a). When he repented and cried out to God for help, God returned his strength. Then Samson began to push the two pillars of the Philistine temple. The temple crumbled to the ground and 3,000 enemies of God were killed, and so was Samson. From Samson we learn that we can get the power of faith through emergency prayer.

Jephthah was the son of a prostitute; he was nihilistic and lived a hermit life. At that time, the Israelites were helpless under the constant threat of the Ammonites. But by faith the Israelites visited Jephthah, established him as their leader and defeated the Ammonites.

These warriors of faith were too weak to do anything. But when they depended on God, they became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies and conquered kingdoms.

We learn that faith makes the weak into strong men and women. As his holy people, we cannot remain in our weaknesses, saying, "You don't understand me." We must remember that God is Almighty God who does not allow us to remain in weakness. God sent his Son Jesus to make us strong while we were still weak in our sins (Ro 5:8). Those who dwell in weakness must repent, depend on God, and experience the power of faith.

Read verses 35-38. These verses exemplify that the power of faith is stronger than anything else, even stronger than death. By faith, many overcame extreme persecutions, human circumstances and conditions. By faith they overcame themselves; they also overcame the world. So the author says in verse 38a, "...the world was not worthy of them." These people show us that faith is stronger than the world and God works with men and women of faith. These people were all commended by God for their faith. We have many things to learn. But God wants us to learn the faith that overcomes the world. God wants us to learn how to obey God and become strong (40).

Let's read verse 29. God gave us the Red Sea to cross over. If we don't cross over our own Red Sea, we cannot please God. When we cross over the Red Sea, we can please God and be a blessing to our descendants. We can cross the Red Sea only by faith.

