

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE
Hebrews 11:30
The Faith Chapter – Week
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Last weekend a group of us from the church went canoeing on the Whiskey Chitto River. I've been canoeing on that river since I was a kid, so I've learned a few things over the years. There are few essentials that you need on a canoe trip. Sunscreen. You especially want to get the tops of your feet and legs, or you'll be sorry. Drinking water is essential. Canoeing is hard work, so you're going to want to have plenty of water. A seat cushion. Those canoe seats can start to hurt after a few hours. A paddle. It's really hard to canoe without a paddle. When I was a kid, my friend and I flipped right when we got in the water, and his paddle disappeared, and so he didn't have a paddle for the entire trip. But the most important thing to have on a canoe trip is a canoe. In fact, you simply cannot go canoeing without a canoe.
2. When it comes to the Christian life, the most essential thing is faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). You can't start the Christian life without faith. You succeed as a Christian without faith. You can't grow without faith. You can't serve God without faith. You can't endure trials without faith.
3. To learn about faith, we are studying Hebrews 11, The Faith Chapter.
4. Today we are going to learn about the relationship between faith and obedience. Specifically, we are going to learn two lessons. Let me begin by stating the lessons, and then we'll see them as they come up in the story:
 - i. Faith is obedient.
 - ii. Obedience requires faith.

II. TEXT

1. **Hebrews 11:30** "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after being marched around by the Israelites for seven days."

III. BACKGROUND

1. Moses delivered the Hebrews from Egypt.
2. When they came to the border of Canaan, Moses sent out twelve spies to check out the land. The spies came back and reported that the people in the land were bigger and stronger than the Hebrews, and the cities were large and fortified. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, tried to persuade the people to look to God's ability rather than their own inability, but the people chose to listen to the ten cowards rather than the two men of faith, and they refused to enter the promised land (See Numbers 13:26-33).
3. Because of their lack of faith, they wandered around the wilderness forty years until that generation of adults died – all the adults except Joshua and Caleb.
4. When Moses died, Joshua took the reins of leadership.

5. God commanded Joshua to lead the people to cross the Jordan to the land of promise. God promised Joshua that He would give the land of Canaan to the Hebrews, and that no one would be able to stand against them.
6. God gave Joshua the keys to success -- courage and total obedience to God's commands.
7. **Joshua 1:8-9** "8 This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. 9 Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."
8. Entering the promised land was going to take courage because it was already inhabited by several people groups -- the Canaanites, Hethites, Hivites, Perizzites, Gergashites, Amorites, and Jebusites (Josh 3:10) -- and they were going to have to conquer these people. It was going to take obedience because if they carefully followed God's instructions, He would fight for them.
9. The first city they came to was Jericho. It was a strongly fortified city (Josh 6:1).
10. But God gave Joshua some strange instructions.
 - i. Have all the Hebrew soldiers march around the city in silence once a day for six days.
 - ii. Behind the troops seven priests were to blow ram's horn trumpets in front of the ark.
 - iii. Behind the priests and the ark there were more troops.
 - iv. On the seventh day, have the soldiers march around the city seven times, while the priests blow the ram's horn trumpets.
 - v. After the seventh time, when when you hear a pro-longed trumpet blast, all of the troops are to shout.
 - vi. Then the city wall will collapse, and the troops can enter the city and defeat the enemy.
11. So the next morning Joshua, the troops, and the priests circled the city once and then returned to the camp. On the second day they did the same thing. This went on for seven days.
12. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times, and then the priests blew their horns. Then Joshua said to the troops, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city (Josh 6:16).
13. So the troops shouted, and the priests blew their trumpets, and the wall collapsed. The troops went into the city, and they captured it.

IV. LESSON 1: FAITH IS OBEDIENT

1. The first thing that jumps out from this story is that faith is obedient. By faith, Joshua and the people obeyed God's instructions.
2. We see two acts of obedience in this story:
 - i. Joshua shared God's instructions with the Hebrews.

- ii. The Hebrews carried out Joshua's instructions.
3. Once again we see the inseparable connection between faith and obedience. Where there is true faith, there will be obedience.
 4. Jesus said the same thing about love. He said on multiple occasions that if you love Him, you will obey Him (John 14:15). In other words, if you think love Jesus but you don't obey His commands, you are deceived. You're a hypocrite. True love for Christ results in obedience.
 5. The same thing can be said about faith. Faith results in obedience. There are a lot of people who say they believe in Jesus, but they don't obey God's commands. That's not the kind of faith that saves. That's not the kind of faith that pleases God.
 6. What do you call the kind of faith that doesn't obey God? Demonic faith. Why? The devil believes in God, but he doesn't obey Him. If you believe in God but don't obey Him, you have demonic faith. You're no different than the devil.
 7. Don't confuse belief with faith. Belief is just mental assent. Faith, or trust, involves the conviction to act on what you believe. For example, one person believes in the importance of regular exercise but doesn't exercise. Another person exercises regularly. The first person has belief, or mental assent. They agree mentally that exercise is good. But the second person has faith, or trust. That's the kind of faith that pleases God. That's true faith. It is the conviction to act on what you believe.
 8. You may agree that there is a God, and that He has the right to impose obligations on your life, but that's not faith. That's just mental assent. True faith goes the distance and obeys God's commands.
 9. Jesus warned us about false faith.
 - i. **Matthew 7:21** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."
 - ii. In other words, there are a lot of people who believe in Jesus but who are not going to heaven. Why? Because they don't have true faith. How do you know if you have true faith? True faith is obedient to God's will.
 10. The book of James warns about false faith.
 - i. **James 1:14, 20** "14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him?... 20 Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?"
 - ii. What does James mean by works? Obedience. James isn't saying that we are saved by obedience. We are saved by faith. But he is saying that faith without obedience is not true faith.
 11. If you believe in Jesus but you are not obedient to His commands, there three possible diagnoses:

- i. First, you may not be saved. When you get saved, God changes your heart and gives you the desire and power to obey God. So, if you're not obedient, if don't desire to be obedient to God, then you may not be saved.
 - ii. Second, maybe you didn't know that Christ demands your obedience. Maybe you just thought Christianity was a matter of belief. Maybe you just thought Jesus was a Savior, and you didn't realize He was a King. In that case, you need to repent of your sins and start following Christ in obedience. That's what Christ demands of you.
 - iii. Third, your faith may be very weak. You may trust in Christ for salvation, you desire to obey Him, but you struggle to trust that His will is best. You worry that obedience will lead to boredom, unhappiness, and hardship. That brings us to the second main lesson from this story.
12. I've noticed something about obedience. Obedience always seems easy when we're talking about someone else. It's like ice-skating. It seems so easy when you watch others do it, but then when you try to get out there it's another story altogether. We took Elle ice-skating for her birthday this year, and at first I wasn't planning on skating because I didn't want to get injured. But after watching them skate for a while, and laughing at them, I thought it looked easy and safe enough. So I rented a pair of skates, laced 'em up and made my way on to the ice. And I will never do that again. I was probably the most awkward ice-skater you have ever seen. When God commands someone else to do something, it looks easy. What's the big deal? Why don't they just obey? But when God commands you to do something, then it's hard. When we look at the story of Joshua and the battle of Jericho, at first glance their obedience seems unimpressive. God commanded them to march around the city for seven days and then shout at the wall. What's the big deal right? But let's think a little deeper about exactly what God was commanding them to do.

V. **FOUR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT GOD'S COMMAND**

1. **It was an unusual command.**

- i. God commanded them to march around the city once a day, for seven days, and then seven times on the seventh day, and then to shout. Very unusual.
- ii. **F.F. Bruce** wrote, "Who ever heard of a fortress being captured that way?" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 327.)

2. **It was a mysterious command.**

- i. In other words, it was hard to understand. As a military strategy, what good is it going to do to march around a city and shout at it?
- ii. **Leon Morris** wrote, "From the worldly point of view, nothing could have been more pointless than simply to march around the city (*Hebrews*, 114)."
- iii. **Elizabeth Elliot** "Sometimes obedience means willingness to do the apparently useless thing, in order that God may do the great thing."

3. **It was a humiliating command.**

- i. **F.F. Bruce** wrote, "... on the face of it, nothing could seem more foolish than for grown men to march round a strong fortress for seven days on end, led by seven priests blowing rams' horns." (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 327.)
- ii. I can imagine the residents of Jericho standing on the wall of the city and watching as the Hebrews marched in silence, and then left. They probably mocked them and said, "What a bunch of idiots!"

4. It was a risky command.

- i. It was especially risk for Joshua. What if the walls didn't fall down like God promised? Joshua would lose the respect of his people. They would likely kill him.
- ii. So God gave Joshua and the Hebrews a very difficult command, and yet they were obedient. We often struggle to obey simple commands such as tithing, or telling the truth, or avoiding profanity. Where did they find the strength to obey such a difficult command?
- iii. They obeyed God because they had faith.
- iv. Faith in what?

VI. WHAT THEY BELIEVED (TWO THINGS)

1. They believed that God keeps His word.

- i. When God commanded Joshua to march around the city, He promised that the walls would fall down.
- ii. **Joshua 6:5** "When there is a prolonged blast of the horn and you hear its sound, have all the troops give a mighty shout. Then the city wall will collapse, and the troops will advance, each man straight ahead."
- iii. The reason that Joshua and the Hebrews obeyed God is because they believed He would fulfill His promise.
- iv. Remember, faith is confidence that God will do what He says He will do. It is confidence that He will fulfill His promises. He promises to provide for you; to work all things together for your good; to comfort you in affliction; to bless you for tithing; to store up eternal rewards for you; to take you to heaven when you die. Faith is confidence that God will keep His word.
- v. One of the fruits of the Spirit is faithfulness (Gal 5:22-23). Faithfulness is keeping your word. It is doing what you say you will do. It is letting your yes be yes, and your no be no. Do you know what the Bible says about God? He is faithful.
- vi. **Psalms 36:5** "Lord, your faithful love reaches to heaven, your faithfulness to the clouds."
- vii. **Psalms 145:13** "The Lord is faithful in all his words...."
- viii. **Isaiah 31:2** "He does not go back on what he says...."
- ix. A lot of people have difficulty trusting God because of their experience with their own earthly father. Somewhere along the way their father promised to do something with them or for them, and he never came through. He

promised to take them fishing, but he didn't. He promised to go to their ball game, but he didn't. But God is not like that. He is faithful. He keeps His word.

- x. Faith is confidence that God will do what He says He will do.
- xi. But there was something else that the Hebrews believed that energized their obedience.

2. They believed that God can do the impossible.

- i. They didn't just believe that God would keep His word; they believed that God was able keep His word, even though it was humanly impossible.
- ii. What did God promise to do? Not something simple. He promised that if they followed His instructions by marching around the wall and shouting at it, it would come crumbling down. That's not humanly possible. But they believed Him.
- iii. Faith is confidence that God can do the impossible.
- iv. Why did they believe that God could do the impossible? All they had to do was to look back on their recent history.
 - 1. Just before this story God did the impossible. To enter the promised land they had to cross the Jordan River. So God commanded the priests to carry the ark and stand in the water. When their feet touched the water, the water was cut off, and the people cross on dry ground.
 - 2. For their entire lives God had been miraculously providing food in the form of mana every morning.
 - 3. For their entire lives God had been leading them in the desert with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
 - 4. They remembered when Moses struck the rock with his staff in the Wilderness of Zin, causing abundant water to gush out.
 - 5. They remembered when God revealed His glory on Mount Sinai in the form of thunder, and lightning, and smoke, and gave them the Ten Commandments.
 - 6. They remembered when God parted the waters of the Red Sea so that they could escape the pursuing Egyptians.
 - 7. They remembered the ten terrible plagues that God brought upon Egypt to punish Pharaoh.
- v. Joshua and the Israelites obeyed God's command to march around the city of Jericho because they had faith – they believe that God would keep His word, and that God could do the impossible.
- vi. This brings us to the second lesson of this story.

VII. LESSON 2: OBEDIENCE REQUIRES FAITH

- i. The first lesson is that faith is obedient. The second lesson is that obedience requires faith.

- ii. Obedience feeds on faith, depends on faith, is founded on faith, it flows from faith, it is strengthened by faith.
- iii. If you are very obedient, it is because you have strong faith. If you struggle with obedience, it could be that you are genuinely saved, but your faith is weak.
- iv. This is good news because it means that if you are struggling with obedience and want to grow, you need focus on growing your faith.
- v. Let's say you have a hurt shoulder, so you go to the physical therapist who gives you a number of exercises to rehabilitate your shoulder. He tells you to do these exercises for thirty minutes a day, seven days a week. But when you go home, you don't do it. Why? Because of a lack of faith. First, either you don't believe the exercises will help, or second, you don't believe that the benefit of the exercises will outweigh the pain of the exercises. Either way, the reason for your disobedience is a lack of faith.
- vi. There are many Christians who struggle to be obedient because they lack faith in God. They don't believe God's commands are good for them. They don't believe that God will reward them for their obedience. They don't believe the pain of obedience will be worth it. So they continue to wallow in sin.
- vii. To grow in obedience, you have to grow in faith.

VIII. HOW TO GROW IN FAITH

1. If you need to grow in faith in order to grow in obedience, how do you grow in faith?
2. Pastor Andy Stanley suggests five faith catalysts.
 - i. Practical Bible teaching. You can get this on Sundays; you can also get this from good Christian books.
 - ii. Private disciplines. These are disciplines like a daily quiet time and tithing.
 - iii. Personal ministry. Find a place in the church to volunteer.
 - iv. Providential relationships. These are other Christians that you get to know whose counsel or example impact you. This is why we encourage you to connect with a Home Group.
 - v. Pivotal circumstances. These are the trials that God brings into your life to grow you.

IX. CONCLUSION

1. So what have we learned from Joshua and the battle of Jericho? We're learning about the relationship between faith and obedience.
2. Two lessons:
 - i. True faith is obedient. If you are not striving for obedience, then your faith is very weak, and you may not be a Christian at all.
 1. **Quote:** "You only believe the parts of the Bible that you obey."
 - ii. Obedience requires faith. If you want to grow in obedience, then you need to grow in faith. You need to have confidence that God loves you; His will is

best; the best life is the obedient life; He will reward you for your obedience.

1. My wife has been telling our kids since they were very little, “The obedient life is the best life.”
3. Karl Marx was no revolutionary. He was just a thinker and a theoretician. There was not great workers’ revolution during his lifetime. After his death in 1883, the philosophy of Marxism was destined to die off. But then in 1889 Lenin, a young Russian, voraciously devoured Marx’s ideas and became a communist. Lenin tireless labor inspired a handful of revolutionaries who within a few years turned Russia upside down. Lenin’s fully-devoted obedience to Marx’s philosophy changed not only Russia, but a hundred years later has enslaved over half the world. My question is this: What would happen if just a small handful of Christians in South Louisiana got serious about obeying God’s word? What if we were as devoted to the philosophy of Jesus Christ as Lenin was to the philosophy of Marx? The result would be a world turned upside down for Jesus.
4. That’s true faith. True faith obeys God’s word. But to grow in obedience, we need to grow our faith.
5. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, the German Martyr, summed it up like this: “Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes.”
6. Today, maybe you realize for the first time that you’re not a true Christian. You believe in Jesus, but that belief has not impacted your life. It hasn’t resulted in obedience. Today, I encourage you to invite Jesus into your life as your Savior and Boss.
7. For others of you, maybe you are confident that you are saved, but you admit that you have been struggling with obedience. And that’s evidence that your faith is weak. Today, I encourage you to recommit your life to God, and ask Him to grow your faith. Maybe your next step is to adopt one or more of the five faith catalysts.