

Title: Faith that Saves, Faith that Perishes

Main Scripture: Hebrews 11:31

Sermon by Rev. Caleb Lee

Greetings and peace be with you. The scripture is from Hebrews 11:31.

31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. Amen

The message is for you, aiming toward a better homeland. It is titled 'Faith that Saves, Faith that Perishes.'

Let's revisit the main scripture, Hebrews 11:31:

"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

The language used in this verse indicates that Rehab's salvation was not solely because of her faith but because she welcomed the spies. Likewise, the people inside Jericho perished not because they lacked faith, but because of their disobedience.

If we insist on attributing their fate to faith, we might need to consider that all the people inside Jericho, not just Rahab, initially believed.

Look at Joshua 2:8-11:

"8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof 9 and said... We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. 11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

From this passage, it's evident that having knowledge of God was not

exclusive to Rahab: everyone inside the city knew about God. They all knew it together, felt it together, trembled together, and were afraid together. All of them knew the God of the heavens and earth, and knowing implies belief. Because everyone inside the city had firmly accepted this knowledge, they believed, melted in fear, and even lost their composure, didn't they?

Therefore, it cannot be said that the knowledge of the people inside the city about God fell short compared to Rahab. Their knowledge of God was by no means different from Rahab's.

This knowledge about God was common among Rahab and the other people inside the city. Moreover, they naturally and unquestioningly believed in what they knew. So, why did Rahab receive salvation while the other people inside the city faced destruction? What does the Bible say about this question of why?

Rahab received salvation because she believed in and obeyed God, and welcomed the spies. However, the other inhabitants knew about God but rejected Him and did not obey. The difference between obedience and disobedience led to Rahab's salvation and the others' destruction. This fact is being clearly affirmed in Hebrews 11:31. Grammatically, it explicitly states so.

The issue lies in obedience and disobedience. Yet, why do many people today believe that merely acquiring knowledge about God, similar to the people in Jericho, is enough for salvation and eternal life? Many seem to think that having faith at the level of those inside Jericho at that time is sufficient for salvation.

Yes, there are believers today who have the knowledge and faith at the level of the people inside Jericho. However, people with similar knowledge and faith are also found among non-Christians, those considered unbelievers. They know that God is the Creator, that He is Jesus' Father, and that Jesus is the Son of God. If they have this level of knowledge about God, what is lacking in them that they are labeled unbelievers?

Now, let's hear what James, the disciple of Jesus, says in James 2:19:

"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder."

"You believe that there is one God." This statement implies, You believe that God is the Creator. You believe that Jesus is God's Son. James says, You believe that? Good! Even the demons believe that. They believe it and shudder.

Oh, isn't it so? Is there any Satan, any devil who doesn't know that God created heaven and earth? No, there isn't. Which demon said they didn't know that God is the Creator and that Jesus is God's Son? Do they not fear God?

Yes, this knowledge, this belief, they have it too. James mentions in verse 14, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?" Faith without deeds, without obedience, cannot save. Confessing, saying, "I believe in Jesus," without the accompanying actions and obedience renders that faith ineffective.

James goes on to say in verse 26, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." Just as a body without a spirit is dead, faith without the actions and obedience that faith requires is dead. That's the truth.

Yes, the Bible consistently states that faith, even if confessed with a simple "I believe," must be accompanied by actions and obedience. Yet, why do some people today think that by merely confessing, "I believe in Jesus," without actions and obedience, they have a faith God considers righteous, and therefore, they are at peace with their salvation? In fact, many people seem to believe this.

Is it because these individuals desire easy entry into heaven that they are at peace with their salvation, even though they possess a faith without actions and obedience? Or is it that they acknowledge deep within their conscience

that their confession of faith, without corresponding actions and obedience, is insufficient for entering heaven, and, out of fear, they wish to believe they are at least going to heaven until the day they enter?

The Apostle James presents Abraham as a model of faith that leads to salvation. He specifically uses Abraham as an example. Abraham always said, "Lord, Lord," and "I believe, I believe." However, he did not merely confess such faith. Abraham demonstrated through his actions and obedience what his faith demanded. In accordance with the faith that Abraham confessed, saying, "I believe, Lord," he offered his beloved and only son as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. When Abraham, out of obedience, was willing to sacrifice his beloved son on Mount Moriah, God, in Genesis 22:12b, said, "Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

God saw Abraham offering his son, and by this act, God acknowledged Abraham's faith as genuine. Thus, in James 2:21, James says, "Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" God considered Abraham's faith righteous at the moment He saw Abraham's obedience and actions.

This faith doesn't become genuine just because I say, "I believe." It becomes genuine when God, by observing our actions, acknowledges it as righteous faith. Yes, that's correct. In John 1:12, who receives the authority to become children of God? Certainly, it is those who believe. However, who is the believer? Looking at John 1:12, isn't it clear that the one who receives is the one who believes in His name? If there is faith, receiving should follow for that faith to be genuine. The one who receives is indeed the one who believes in His name. To such individuals, the authority to become children of God is granted.

Let's revisit our main scripture:

Hebrews 11:31 says, "By faith, the prostitute Rahab...welcomed the spies." She received salvation because she welcomed them. However, if we talk about what

she knew about God, wouldn't Rahab have had no more knowledge than the other people living in Jericho? Rahab and the people of Jericho knew the same things about God. So, they had the same faith in God. However, even with the same knowledge about God, the people of Jericho did not welcome God's people. Instead, they tried to capture them and prevent them from entering the city. Therefore, they perished. But Rahab, despite having the same knowledge as the people of Jericho, believed in God and, as required by her faith, welcomed God's people. She even allowed them to leave in peace. Therefore, Rahab did not perish with the other people of Jericho. The Bible records that these actions of Rahab and the people of Jericho became the cause of salvation and destruction, respectively.

To reiterate, faith that God considers righteous is not achieved merely by believing what one knows and confessing, "I believe." When the actions demanded by that faith manifest, and God sees those actions, is it not then that He considers the previous faith as righteous?

Would Rahab have merely offered a superficial welcome? No, she wouldn't have.

Looking at Joshua 2:12, it records, "Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you." Rahab's act of showing kindness to the spies had a purpose.

Continuing, it says, "Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death." Rahab was actually making a demand. She was saying, "You must also show kindness to me and my family. Spare the lives of my parents, my brothers and sisters, and everyone related to us. Save us from death, and now, swear to the Lord and give me a sign of your sincerity."

Rahab desired to become a citizen of God's kingdom, making it her own kingdom. That's why she welcomed the spies when she saw them. Rahab's act

of welcoming the spies was to request salvation. She wanted to become a citizen of the heavenly kingdom.

Yes, her desire to become a citizen of the heavenly kingdom prompted her to take appropriate actions, and those actions, accompanied by her faith, led to her salvation. Rahab had to welcome the spies in order to request fervently for her salvation. For this, she even risked her life. If Rahab's actions, that she did for the sake of her soul and eternal life, had been found out by the authorities in Jerico, she would have had to face death. Rahab risked her life when she took care of the spies.

Rahab did so much that when the two spies spoke in Joshua 2:18, they said, "Unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house." And in verse 14b, the spies promised, "we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land." And it happened just as they promised.

The soldiers who were to bring about this salvation asked Rahab to make the scarlet cord, which was the reminder of Rehabs' good deeds, visible when the time came for them to save her and her family. They said, "When we see it, we will spare your life."

The spies said to Rahab, "We need to see it to know that you desire us, that you sincerely welcome the kingdom of God, and that you genuinely want to enter God's kingdom. Only then, by seeing it, will we know." That's what they meant.

So, could Rahab's household have been saved solely by her inward belief in what she learned through hearing and reading, and by confessing with her lips, "I believe?" If Rahab had not shown her actions, demonstrating her faith and making them visible to those who would save her, what would have happened to Rahab's household? Surely, they would not have been saved.

Rahab confidently spoke in verse 21 because of the actions she took according to her faith. She said something that the others inside the walls of Jericho could not say, because she was the only one who acted kindly to the spies and welcomed them. Therefore, Rahab's response to the spies' demands was, "Agreed, let it be as you say." Rahab then tied the scarlet cord to the window. She tied the scarlet cord to the window from that day on, not knowing when the time would come, but waiting until then.

Rahab did just that. And because she did that, Matthew 1:5 records, "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab." In other words, Rahab married Salmon and gave birth to the famous Boaz. The descendants of Boaz include David and Solomon, among others. Thus, Rahab and her household became the people of Christ, citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Hallelujah!

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we have prayed, thinking that merely confessing, "I believe," based on what we have heard, read, and learned about God, would be considered as a faith that is righteous in your eyes.

However, through today's sermon, we have come to realize that the people inside the walls of Jericho had a similar level of knowledge about You, God. Furthermore, we've learned that Satan and the evil spirits following him also had enough knowledge to believe and understand that You are alive and active in history. However, their actions revealed that they rejected Your people, refusing to serve you despite knowing and believing in You. Their actions showed that their faith, although they knew and believed in God, did not meet the conditions for a faith that leads to salvation.

Similarly in Rahab's time, knowing, believing, and confessing alone would not be sufficient for salvation. It is only when our faith is demonstrated through actions of obedience, like with Rahab, that we receive salvation. Rahab, with a heart desiring to be a citizen of the heavenly kingdom, took actions that were

consistent with her faith, leading to her salvation.

Lord, we are nervous, and we feel the challenge. Oh Lord, how can we keep all Your words? Yet, like Rahab, like Abraham, help us to demonstrate even a few actions that follow our faith. Lord, come with the Holy Spirit, so that our obedience may be seen by You, and You may consider it as righteousness. We earnestly pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.