

Faith and Works

- ²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.
- ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.
- ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Hebrews 11:17-28

The Great Question

FOR 500 YEARS A DEBATE HAS RAGED. It concerns perhaps the most important question anyone can ask. [How can I be saved?](#) Of course, this question assumes that there is a God and that he offers salvation to all who hear the [gospel](#). We have come here today because we know this is true, have heard his call, have responded by God's grace, and desire to

worship him for saving us. Hebrews exists to explain and prove to you that this God is known through Jesus Christ, who—since he is God—created the world and is the exact image of the invisible God to us, but who—because he is also man—has offered a sacrifice that is absolutely perfect and pleasing to the Father. This sacrifice is what makes God favorable towards sinners and through it we are saved.

The Answer

But what is the gospel? This question is basically the flip side of the “how can I be saved” coin. It answers that question. Meaning “good news,” gospel (*euaggelion*) is the word many Protestants use choose to self-identify: Evangelical. Getting the Gospel right [content], understanding it properly [faith], and growing in this knowledge [sanctification] are terribly important things. The Apostle writes, “**Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed**” (**Gal 1:8**). That is how serious he takes it.

The Content

Getting the gospel right is about **the content** of the message that is being delivered. It is an **objective** thing; it comes from outside of you. That means it isn't about how it makes you feel or whether you agree with it or like it. It is simply about what is and what was. Like news (in fact, it *is* news), it tells of persons and events that took place in the past and are conveyed as information that you need to know. Like, “**The World Trade Center has just been hit by planes. You need to get out. Now. Follow the firemen outside of the building to this safe house set up a few blocks away and you will be safe.**” That would have been good news if you were in the lower part of the Tower on 9-11.

Likewise, the Gospel. This content of the gospel is summarized in 1 Corinthians 15. It says, “**I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you ... as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one**

time, most of whom are still alive” (1 Cor 15:1-6).

As you can hear, the content involves **Jesus**. It then involves his **death** for a purpose: for sins. Then his **burial** (he really was dead). This his **resurrection** from the dead (he is now alive). Finally, his **public appearances** to many people (important because they validated the message. You could go and ask any of them what they saw). And it involves one more thing repeated more than once. These things happened just as they were predicted in various ways **in the Old Testament**. In other words, God told us this was going to happen and it did. These prophecies and types are the nail in the coffin to skepticism, for it is not possible that such things as these occurred by accident. They were all in accordance with the Scriptures. This is the objective content of the gospel.

You have just heard even in brief form the news that makes Christians. But this news does no good for you unless that which is outside of you is internalized. The objective has to become subjective. This involves all that the Bible means by the **understanding of the gospel** and then the gradual learning about what it does to and for you. It is at this point that the great debate has raged. This will be the

focus of the rest of our time together.

The Right Understanding

To get at it, we need to go to another book—**James**. The focus is **chapter 2**. In the passage, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus is suddenly concerned with the topics of **faith and works**. Faith, of course, is the central theme of Hebrews 11 which we are in today. Faith and works happen to be my focus in the short set of verses that we are looking at (**Heb 11:29-31**). But this focus also springboards us backwards and forwards throughout the chapter to others whose faith “worked.”

In his controversial and often misunderstood treatment of faith and works, James gives two examples from the lives of OT saints. Both happen to be found in Hebrews 11 as well. The first should come as no surprise, since he is regarded as the Father of our Faith (**Rom 4:11-12**) and is found throughout the NT. This is **Abraham**. The story is one we looked at last week: Abraham offering up his son Isaac on the altar (**James 2:21-23; Heb 11:17-19**). The second is much more surprising given that other than a

genealogy (**Matt 1:5**), the person described is only mentioned in these two chapters of the NT. It is even more surprising when you consider that this person is about as opposite of a human being as you can get from Abraham. He was a man. She is a woman. He is the father of the Jews. She is a pagan Canaanite. He is Yahweh's priest-king. She is a prostitute commoner. Her name is **Rahab**.

So what does James say about these two? He says, “**Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?**” (**James 2:21**). Similarly, he says, “**Was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?**” (**25**). The controversial language is: **justified by works**. Why is this controversial? Because the Apostle Paul says, “**We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works**” (**Rom 3:28**).¹ Now you can see why there has been such heated disagreement.

So the controversy is over the question **what justifies?** Is

¹ When Paul says this he always adds, “... of the law” and has in mind things like circumcision, or holy days, or diets etc. We will see below that we aren't justified by any works, but it is curious that James doesn't talk about Abraham being justified by the work of circumcision. He chooses a story, a different category altogether—the obedience to the direct command of God. The same goes for Rahab, except she is simply obeying the Golden Rule rather than doing something ritually religious in nature.

it faith alone or is it faith plus something else (baptism, works, etc.)? It is also over **the nature of justification** itself. Is justification a declaration or a process and **why would that even matter**? It is a one-time occurrence or something that takes place again and again and again? Again, this is not about the content of the gospel, but about how that content gets inside of us and what it does to us. In some very important place, Rome and Protestants simply disagree about this. In other places, they seem to talk past each other. Sometimes they misunderstand each other. Sometimes it is even deliberate.

For example, 500 years ago next year, **Martin Luther** the great Reformer nailed his 95 Thesis on the door of the Wittenberg church. This started the Protestant Reformation. Luther wrote tons and tons on theology, commentaries on many books of the Bible, and even translated the Bible into German. Luther is known for a comment he made about James in his first edition to his introduction to the NT translation. He called it “**an epistle of straw**.” That’s not very nice.

Much has been written about this, including the fact that

this comment did not appear in any later editions.² In other words, he took it back. That doesn't seem to bother his detractors. The talking point that comes out of it is usually that **Luther hated good works** because he was an antinomian who only wanted to sin and feel good about it. In a short introduction to James' Epistle with Luther as his foil, after writing a section called "Speak of the Devil," one Catholic writer concludes, "[His] attack on St. James' Epistle was obviously in his 'best' interest. When something contradicts you, the easiest (if not the most honest) way to deal with it, is to deny its validity. What surprises us more than his hatred of St. James' Epistle is that Luther actually would accept the Gospels or any of the rest of the New Testament."³ But is this even true? Did Luther want to throw out James simply because he thought it contradicted his theology that he got from Paul? Such a view is neither loving nor accurate about Martin Luther, even though Luther did struggle with this issue. This then takes us right back to James and Hebrews.

The first thing to notice is that **both are dealing with**

² For a good short introduction see James Swan, "Six Points On Luther's 'Epistle of Straw', *A&O Ministries*, April 3, 2007 at <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php/2007/04/03/six-points-on-luthers-epistle-of-straw/>

³ Brother André Marie, "The Epistle of Straw," *Catholicism.org* [Jan 30, 2006], <http://catholicism.org/epistle-of-straw.html>.

faith. Faith is the theme of Hebrews 11, occurring as a word 25 times in the chapter. James 2 has the word appear 12 times. Obviously this is a major theme of both. Again, both give examples of faith and the two examples in James from the OT both appear in Hebrews 11. Let's look at the Rahab passages first.

James again says, “**And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?**” (**James 2:25**). Again the focus is on her works and he attaches the language of justification to it. Hebrews says, “**By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies**” (**Hebrews 11:31**). Disobedience would be the opposite of doing a good work. Good works are things done in obedience. Disobedience would be bad works. So Hebrews has the very same focus. This is why I wanted to have a whole sermon from Hebrews 11 on the relationship between faith and works. It is a very important topic to get right.

Let's think about **the story of Rahab**, and then we will look at some of these other examples in Hebrews 11

regarding “works” or “obedience.” Her story appears in Joshua 2 and 6. Immediately after Joshua, the new leader of Israel after Moses’ death is told again and again to “**be strong and courageous**” as you about to enter the land, in the very first story of his leadership we find him sending two spies into the heavily fortified city of Jericho in the Promised Land. They come to the house of a prostitute and lodged there (**Josh 2:1**).

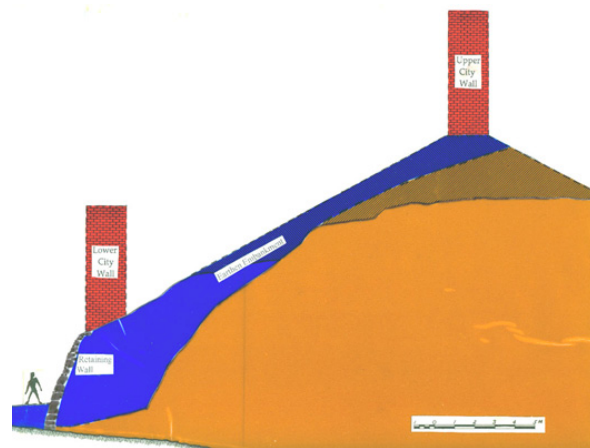
They obviously met this woman in public (what were they doing talking to a prostitute?), and it was told to the king of the city who told her to bring the men to him (**2-3**). Word had gotten out that this host of people east of the land across the Jordan was looking to enter and take it. Her answer to the king at first **deflects the question**. She had hidden them, but she doesn’t say anything about that. “**True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from**” (**4**). Then she **lied**, “**When the gate was about to close at dark, they men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly**” (**5**). But she had brought them up to her roof and hid them in the flax (**6**).

As the king’s army went looking for them (**7**), Rahab went to the roof (**8**) and said, “**I know that the LORD has**

given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us” (9), for you defeated the giants Sihon and Og and nothing can stop you (10). She then made them swear that when they took the city they would spare her and her families lives (12-13). She asks for a sign of their word, and this becomes the famous “scarlet thread” that she ties out her window so that when Israel destroyed the city, she would be spared (18-19). Then she sends them on their way in safety (15-16).

What James and Hebrews both commend as an act of faith is her welcoming the people of God into her home against to grave consequences if she were to be caught. Not her sin. Not her prostitution. Not her lying. But her faith. This kind of a person can have real faith! Christianity is not for perfect people, but sinners. Now notice, she has faith in a very specific person. She has heard about Yahweh and confesses that he will destroy the city. But it is the action itself, the work of receiving the spies that is said to be an act of obedience and which “justified” her. Put simply, *Rahab did something*. When the opportunity presented itself to her, she could have turned them in, ignored them, run for her life, or helped them. She helped them. This was her “work.”

Now, this is hardly unique to Hebrews 11. The verse before it relates the second part of this story. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days” (Heb 11:30). It is difficult to imagine this. These walls were not two by fours with some drywall over them, although even that would not ordinarily fall simply by marching around them and yelling at the end. There were several parts to the walls. The base was a retaining wall. It was 12-15 ft. high. On top of that was a six ft. thick 20-26 ft. There was a similar taller and thinner wall above that, meaning that the total wall was 46 ft. above the ground outside of the retaining wall. Not only this, but the entire city was erected on a mound of dirt, making it that much more defensible from intruders. This city was the crown jewel of the eastern Promised Land.



But as the story goes, Joshua commanded the people to march silently around the city for six days. Then on the seventh day they were to march around it seven times (about a nine-acre diameter). Suddenly, with the sound of the trumpet, the wall “fell flat” (Josh 6:20). God had delivered on his promise of the future. The Israelites for their part obeyed him. Again, they did something. The opportunity arose and they had a choice. They could laugh at Joshua and do nothing. They could run for the hills knowing that there was an army awaiting them. Or they could obey. They chose to obey. They did what Joshua and the LORD told them to do. This was an “work” of faith to use James’ term.

Going back to the verse before this in Hebrews we find yet another story like this. “By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned” (29). This is perhaps the most famous story in the OT. Blocked in by a huge ocean on one side, a vast wilderness and mountains on the other, and a raging army of the most powerful soldiers in the world at the time, the people of Israel were stuck. They grumbled to Moses for taking them out here only to

die at the hand of Pharaoh.

But Moses told them that God would deliver them. He simultaneously kept the army at bay with a pillar of fire and opened the Red Sea so that the people crossed, not in a murky swamp, but on dry land. All those people crossing an ocean, walking through waters heaped up on one side and the other. These are a people who sometimes are said to be basically faithless and yet at other times are said to have believed. In this instance, they had faith and they walked across the Sea.

Again, **they did something!** They walked. The opportunity presented itself. They could have thrown themselves at the feet of Pharaoh and begged for mercy. They could have run in a thousand directions into the hot desert mountains. They could have attacked Moses and killed him. They chose to walk through the sea. This was their “work.” Faith does things.

On the other hand—and pay careful attention to this—the Egyptians **did the same thing!** They crossed the sea. Or, at least they tried. Was theirs an act of faith? Not the right faith. Sure, they had faith that the waters would not collapse. But they did not have faith in the reason why the

waters separated in the first place. In Egyptian mythology, Anuket, Nu, Satet, Sobek, Osiris, and Hapi were all water gods/goddesses. But they did not believe in Yahweh who alone holds the power of the sea. “The voice of Yahweh is over the waters; the God of glory thunders; Yahweh over many waters,” the Psalmist says about this event (and or the Flood). Where were the gods of Egypt to keep the waters open? And they drown in the sea. Therefore, acts can look the same and be the same, but if the object of the act of faith isn't right, then it isn't faith at all.

Though these are our three verses today, because they fit next to each other with this particular theme, I should at least mention that this theme has been here in Hebrews 11 from the beginning. Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice (Heb 11:4). He did something. He obeyed God's command. Enoch walked with God (5). This was an entire lifetime of doing something, of works and good deeds. Noah built an ark (7). God commanded him. He obeyed. His obedience resulted in the boat that God would use to save the world out of the Flood. Abraham went to a land he knew not where (8). He went. He did something. God told him to go. He went. Sarah, his wife, received power to conceive (11)

and it took **the two of them** (12) to do something to make that happen even though their bodies were as good as dead. Sarah's birth was not that of a virgin you know.

As both Hebrews and James talk about, Abraham was fully prepared to **offer up his unique son** as a sacrifice at the Lord's command. Abraham believed and even thought of the resurrection in the process. Nevertheless, Abraham was willing to kill his son at God's command (17). Isaac (20) and Jacob (21) both **blessed their children**. They used their mouths and hands and spoke the future into the lives of their sons, not because they had some mystical view of word-faith, but because they believed the promises of God concerning their children. But they did something. So also did Joseph (22) who similarly **prophesied about the future** of the Exodus and his own bones going home. These people didn't sit on their hands, defy God, or run away. They did what God told them to do. These were acts, actions, activities, deeds, works, whatever you want to call them.

We could go on again after the story of Rehab in Hebrews 11. What is "**conquering kingdoms**" if not going out and doing something in obedience to the LORD (33). How do you "**enforce justice**" (33) if you aren't acting and

doing? The same goes for everything mentioned after this: stopping lion's mouths, quenching fire, escaping the sword, becoming mighty in war, receiving back your dead, being mocked and flogged, chained and imprisoned (33-38).

In all of these things, people are doing something. Faith does things. Faith obeys. Now, not all of them are the same kind of thing, and I want to talk about this for a moment. Receiving back your dead took a woman going to a prophet and asking him to help. Fighting an army meant putting your life on the line. Going to a strange land meant giving up everything you had. Being sawn in two meant going the full distance of the race set before you, paying the ultimate sacrifice. Not all “works” have the same dangers or consequences. Some are actively receiving while others are active in doing. But they would all be considered as “works” by James and are considered “obedience” by Hebrews.

As I've thought about these kinds of works, I noticed something that they all lack. They all lack a written or oral tradition about ceremonial religious law. Have you ever noticed this? When Paul talks about being justified by faith rather than works, the works he has in contrast to faith are the “works of the law.” By this he doesn't have in mind

something like “do not murder.” People already know by nature than when you break that you are condemned.

Now, some like to think that if they just don't murder and don't commit the “big” sins, that this will get them into heaven, as if God weighs the cosmic scales on a balance and if your good deeds outweigh the bad, you get in. No faith required. That may be what pagans think my nature, and perhaps even some who call themselves Christians think the same thing. That's why Jesus tells the people that they must be perfect if they wish to enter heaven by their works. “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48). That's Jesus' scale.

Instead of these things however, Paul focuses on things that people think they can do to overcome their sins and justify themselves before God in a religious way. His most common example is circumcision. Circumcision was a ceremonial act that brought a male into the fold of the Israelite covenant people. It presupposes some kind of belief in God, otherwise you would never do it. Now obviously, if you are a Jew then circumcision isn't something you choose for yourself to do. But if you are a Gentile convert to Christianity, there was a very real temptation to get

circumcised to be counted as righteous, since this is what the law required of Jews. Here there was a very real choice for you.

He also talks about things like keeping holy days or religious “do not touch, do not taste” taboos and the like. Though again this often has a Jewish context, the Gentiles of those days had their own sets of religious duties, and it was as much a temptation for them to carry over their religious convictions or to adopt those of the Jews in order to be seen a “good Christians.” We start with the Spirit and we end with these laws. This is the constant battle of the NT.

We have the same problems in our own day with things like Fundamentalism which say that if you drink or smoke or chew or go with girls who do that you cannot be a Christian. These become religious exercises that we abstain from in order to make us “good people.” Or, in the case of positive things, we put pressures on ourselves or other to do daily devotions or go to church or whatever and these make us “good Christians.” So they can be “don’ts” or “do’s.”

But none of these things justify you, the Apostle says. Rather, we are justified by faith apart from the works of the law. He is concerned with the grounding of being saved, and

that doesn't come from you. It comes from someone else. That's the good news, and it is received by faith alone. Thus, the famous quote about Abraham, "He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" is quoted against something like circumcision which he didn't have to perform on himself until many years after he had believed per God's instruction. Abraham justified because he believed God.

But James and Hebrews do not bring up these kinds of examples with regard to faith. I think this betrays their different purpose in talking about the relationship of works and faith. They aren't talking about the grounds of justification or of being declared righteous by faith. They are talking about what faith looks like after it is received — from different sides of the coin.

James puts the negative spin on it. If you claim you have faith but don't do anything, your faith is dead. James is attacking a very specific problem. Hebrews puts the positive spin on it. Look at all the great deeds of our fathers that were done in faith! Hebrews is preaching to your heart and encouraging you in your faith. Let's look at James first.

The word "dead" appears in this section of James three

times. Too often, then as today, people claim to believe in God. But this claim is little more than a fire insurance policy. When the fires of hell start burning at the ankles, just take the policy to heaven and escape the flames of eternal punishment. “I’m a Christian, of course I’m a Christian. I believe in God.” Some even get more specific and claim to believe in Jesus. But Jesus says, “Many will say to me Lord, Lord.” And I will say “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matt 7:22-23). Even Jesus talks about works, doesn’t he? But he also talks about knowing someone. Knowing them comes first. If he doesn’t know you and if you don’t know him, then all there is to base anything on is your lawlessness.

So James asks, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” (James 2:14). You can hear from this that James has two different kinds of “faith” in mind. One does something. The other doesn’t.

He talks about clothing the naked and feeding the hungry (15). But if you see such a thing and just walk on by, or worse, with his well and tell him, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled” and do nothing to help him, not only is

that no good, it is downright demonically mean (16; cf. 19). Thus he concludes that this kind of faith without the “works” of compassion is “dead” (17). Now, what is a dead faith?

What kind of life does it have? What kind of existence does it have? Dead faith is a corpse in a cemetery and you who claim to have such a thing are but **zombies**, the walking dead, physically moving but still in your trespasses and sins, doing evil works, cannibalizing your own brothers. You need life and you need it now. The good news is being a walking dead is curable in the spiritual world, by the power of the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Are you listening?

He then takes the hypothetical person who tries to pit faith against works as if it is only one or the other. “**You have faith and I have works**” (18). Some have misread Paul as saying the former. Some have—incredibly (given that he presently talking about this very subject) misunderstood James as saying the latter. James teaches works salvation and Paul teaches faith salvation. No. They both teach the same salvation. Paul talks about the grounds of being justified—faith alone. James talks about the fruit of justification—

good works.

The Reformation gets dogged on this point by Rome all the time. Yet Calvin said, “That we may not then fall into that false reasoning which has deceived the Sophists, we must take notice of the twofold meaning of the word *justified*. Paul means by it the gratuitous imputation of righteousness before the tribunal of God; and James, the manifestation of righteousness by the conduct, and that before men, as we may gather from the preceding words, “Shew to me thy faith,” &c. In this sense we fully allow that man is justified by works, as when any one says that a man is enriched by the purchase of a large and valuable estate, because his riches, before hid, shut up in a chest, were thus made known.”⁴ And Luther himself, the supposed great father of all things antinomian and unbiblical said, “Faith is a living, restless thing. It cannot be inoperative. We are not saved by works; but if there be no works, there must be something amiss with faith” [*Here I Stand*, 259]. And, “It is one thing that faith justifies without works; it is another thing that faith exists without works” [LW 34: 175-176].

⁴ John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 314–315.

This is the true Reformation view of faith and works, and it is exactly what James is saying.

“You think your faith is great apart from works? My faith is real because it has works” (18). You think that believing in God is what it is all about? “Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (19). What a startling and damning verse! Who among us would ever have thought that demons believe in God! But they do. Of course they do. Most people today who claim faith and even have real faith don’t shudder at God. It is the plague of our age. God is too nice, too tame, too domesticated, too much like a boyfriend to ever make anyone shudder like that. Those demons must not know the real God. Oh, no my friend. That is exactly why they shudder. “What have you to do with us, Son of God. Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?” (Matt 8:29), they asked the Lord Jesus.

Instead of this kind of faith that is even less than demons have (of all things), James calls those who think that mere belief in God is enough “fools” (20) and he said that their faith is “useless” without works. Why? Not because we are saved by faith and works, but because faith that has no works is not faith. It is dead. It is lifeless. It is worthless. It can’t

save anyone. **Only you can know what kind of faith you have**, if you claim it at all. Only you know if you are playing games with God, if you are fooling others or even yourself, because at the end of the day it really just doesn't matter to you what the Bible says about faith. If this is you, then please stop. Turn around. Repent of your lifeless acts of crossing the Red Sea apart from faith. Otherwise, you will be destroyed.

But Hebrews is not about warning like this. **Hebrews has a very different purpose in mind**. It is written as a sermon of **encouragement** so that even though it has many warning passages, it always insists that you who are listening and who claim Christ really do have a saving faith. That is why it presents its heroes in such a positive way. Look at this guy. Look at this woman. Look at this picture perfect hero. Look at this complete loser in the eyes of the world. Look at this saint. Look at this sinner. All are leveled as equal by faith. God looks no more or less favorably upon one than the other. Look at their faith and how their faith always caused them to obey God. Now, think about your own faith and ask yourself, it is doing those kinds of things?

Both tactics have their place in the Bible and in the

church. **The warnings** are for those who are pretending or who do not have faith at all. The terrors of judgment await and so the need to be woken up out of complacency and slumber is immediate. And God rescues many out of the kingdom of Satan in this way. **The sweet comforts** are for those who are restless and doubtful, weak in their faith and in need of good news. God does not go around breaking bruised reeds or snuffing out faintly burning wicks. Rather, he restores to health and fans the flames of faith through encouragement of those who have gone before, knowing that they trusted in the same God you are called to believe. And remember, it is the object of faith—Christ himself who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is who all were looking to in faith.

Let me finish this morning with **two reasons** why should believe and have faith, and then in faith, from faith, by faith do the actions that God desires. The first is that the three examples from our short text today all teach us one thing about God. The **Exodus**—opening up a sea so that people can walk through on dry land. The walls of **Jericho**—crumbling down before trumpets of obedient people. The protection of **Rahab** whom God kept safe because she took

in the spies. What do these three all teach us about God?

God is powerful. God is *very* powerful. We can't begin to estimate the power of God. Neither could the Egyptians. They committed the very same "act," the same "work" if you will that Israel did. They crossed through the sea on dry land. Until they were destroyed for lack of faith. Throughout history, God has displayed his power time and time again. Yet, many still scoff, and the scoffing only grows louder in our day. But is this really a deity that you want to trifle with? Israel didn't. Rahab didn't. Instead, they feared God and did what was right by faith.

If his power isn't enough to persuade you to trust in him and to go out and do good works, if fear alone isn't enough to make you do this—and God only knows why it wouldn't be, then maybe his **mercy** will. For you see, God is not just brute power. No, the reason people are allowed to mock, to scoff, to scorn the living God is because he is even right now very patient with them. He loved us when we were his enemies. He sent his Son to die for our sins. His Son who is God. He suffered beyond belief, not merely physically, but the very wrath of God, so that we might have life and have it abundantly. So that we might have faith.

So renew your vigor to fight the spiritual war that is before you. Do not give into the wrong fear, but fear him who has the power over death and hell. Forsake your evil ways, your sins that so entangle. Repent as many times as you sin and never give up. But then go and do what is right. Consider as we have today that this is not just religious duties to “be a better Christian.” If God has justified you by faith, you are a perfect Christian in his eyes for you have been given the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, go and do what is right. May your works follow your faith like day follows the night. Do what is right wherever you are, whenever the case presents itself to you. Do the works of faith, for good trees bear good fruit.

May God be pleased to grant this faith to you by the hearing of his word.