

Hebrews 11:30,31; Joshua 6 Saying Amen to God's Judgment

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace – v. 31

In verses 30 & 31 we're given two points of view for the same historical narrative. One point of view comes from outside the walls of Jericho; the other point of view comes from inside the walls of Jericho. I find it interesting that in the first point of view from outside the walls of Jericho no specific character is mentioned. Listen to the words of v. 30 – *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.* We know of course that the reference is to Joshua and the children of Israel. And I think it would be correct to say that the reference could be to the entire nation on a corporate level, as it were. This generation of Israelites had the faith to conquer Canaan. The generation before them had to wander in the wilderness for their lack of faith.

On the other hand it may also be true to say that the lack of mention of any particular character in v. 30 may serve the purpose of drawing our attention more closely to the character that is mentioned in v. 31 where we find mentioned *the harlot Rahab*. She perished not with them that believed not. There is truly a sense in which her faith is very impressive.

Try to view the entire episode of Jericho from her perspective if you will. Here is a woman that, like the other inhabitants of Jericho was a sinner. She would have felt comfortable in the presence of other sinners. She would have enticed others to sin. She would have lived an ungodly life and may have been responsible for the destruction of many families.

By nature she was a rebel against God and it would have been quite natural for her to share in the fear and resentment toward God and toward the people of God that would have characterized the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho. After all Paul teaches us at the end of Rom. 1 that sinners who know in their hearts the judgment of God not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them. There is a loyalty, in other words, among sinners. Whatever else they may not have in common they share a common desire for the pleasures of sin and they share a common disloyalty to God and to God's laws.

In Rahab's case there might have been the temptation, even, for her to think that she could thwart God's purpose by giving up the spies that she hid on the roof of her house. As believers we know that such a notion is ludicrous, but unsaved sinners are constantly deceiving themselves into thinking that they can somehow thwart God.

But instead we find a different kind of thinking occupying Rahab's mind and heart. We find her in Joshua 2 acknowledging to the 2 spies that the Lord was God in heaven above and in the earth beneath. We find her acknowledging the futility of fighting against God. She knows that the city of Jericho is doomed to destruction. She knows that the Israelites have become the tool in God's hand to execute his judgment. And rather than fight against

God she has the desire to surrender to God and so she successfully negotiates deliverance for herself and all her house.

Now at this point it's important to remember the purpose behind Hebrews 11. Paul said at the end of chapter 10 that now is the time for the just to live by faith. And throughout this 11th chapter of Hebrews Paul has been citing various characters throughout Old Testament history that lived by faith. As we've been paying attention to these characters we've been raising the question – what do these various characters teach us in the matter of living by faith? What does Noah teach us? What does Enoch teach us? What does Abraham and Sara teach us? What does Moses teach us about living by faith?

And now we must ask ourselves the same question as it relates to Rahab the harlot. What does she teach us about living by faith? And the lesson she teaches us is a very important lesson as well as a very challenging lesson. It's a lesson that is not easily learned and it's a lesson that at one point in Israel's history they were called upon to affirm and very few of them would affirm it. What is the lesson that I'm now referring to? It's simply this –

There are times when the person living by faith must say amen to the judgment of God. Isn't that what we find Rahab doing? In itself that's not such a hard thing to do as long as we're considering someone else. When the accusing finger is pointing away from ourselves we may acknowledge other cities or other nations or other individuals to be worthy of God's judgment but when that judgment come close to home then it's not such an easy thing to do. And yet living by faith requires us to say amen to the judgment of God even when that judgment comes close to home as it did in the case of Rahab the harlot.

And so I want to focus on that theme this morning – the theme of:

Saying Amen to the Judgment of God

The first thing I would have you see with regard to this theme is that saying *amen* to God's judgment:

I. Springs From a Changed Heart

Verse 30 tells us that *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days*. Here was something that took place historically that was supernatural. And apart from this supernatural provision from God it is doubtful that the city of Jericho could have been conquered.

The preceding generation of Israelites had counted such a thing as impossible. That generation had taken note that the cities in the promised land were walled cities and that there were giants in those cities and that the Israelites themselves appeared as grasshoppers before the inhabitants of Canaan. The only thing that was left out of the equation for that generation of Israelites was God Himself.

We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we 10 of the 12 spies said earlier to Moses (Num. 13:31). And the minority report given by Joshua and

Caleb said in Num. 14:8 *If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.* I have often thought on these two reports given by the spies that were sent by Moses into the Canaan. The majority report was based on what the fleshly eye saw; the minority report was based on whether or not God delighted in his people.

What a challenge such reports present to us. How often is our faith challenged on the issue of whether or not God delights in his people. Who knows what kind of exploits we could do in our service to Christ if we truly believed that God delights in us? We find it easier, however, to build the case against ourselves as to why God would not delight in us. After all we tend to fail God often don't we? And we tend to be governed by what we see, rather than what God has said and so we prevent ourselves from doing much for God at all.

You know the story, of course. The succeeding generation of Israelites believed in God and in the obedience of faith they circled the city once a day for six days – and then circled it seven times on the seventh day and with their shout and the sounding of the trumpets the walls of Jericho fell down flat before them and the way was made for them to conquer Jericho.

Think of that scene from the perspective of those that were shut up in the city. When they saw the walls fall down before them they surely would have realized that the hand of God was against them and the day of judgment had come. Their hearts were undoubtedly so petrified with fear and the reality of judgment that they wouldn't have had any power to withstand the Israelites.

Could I suggest to you that what happened to the walls of Jericho, historically, is the same thing that happens spiritually to a saved sinner. It's the same thing that would have happened to Rahab. Before the walls of Jericho fell, you see, the walls of resistance that surrounded her heart had fallen and this enabled her to say *amen* to the judgment that had come upon her city.

Man in his sin, you see, has a closed heart to the things of God. Man in his pride doesn't like to believe that this is the case. We like to think of ourselves as open minded and reasonable – free from any prejudice or bias. But ever since the fall of man into sin mankind lost the ability to be objective and unbiased. And today it would be fair and it would be scriptural to say that everything man does, and every inquiry man makes and every pursuit man enters is governed by this bias. The sinner is biased against God.

And this is especially the case when it comes to the matter of God's judgment. Man's hard heart and deceitful pride keeps him from acknowledging that he deserves God's judgment. He may condescendingly admit that he's slightly less than perfect but that's a far cry from admitting that he deserves God's condemnation.

In the book of Acts we're given a spiritual account of what could be termed the walls of Jericho falling. It occurs in Acts 16:14 which says with regard to a woman by the name of Lydia that the Lord opened her heart. And the result of her opened heart was that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul.

Here was a miracle of grace, then, that was no less supernatural than the walls of Jericho falling down. The Lord did that work. This is what gives us hope in our efforts in evangelism. You and I can't open hearts any more than the children of Israel could bring down the walls of Jericho in their own power. But the Lord can bring down the walls and the Lord can open hearts no matter how shut and secured those hearts are.

This is what gives us encouragement to pray for souls whose hearts are hard. This is what encourages us to persevere in our praying for our children. The Lord can bring down the walls. The Lord can open hearts. And once the Lord performs such a miracle then it enables the sinner to say *amen* to the judgment of God.

Here, then, is a test to your own faith – have you been able to say *amen* to God's judgment upon you? Are you able to say *Yes, Lord, I see myself as a sinner. I see myself as a worthy recipient of your judgment because I've broken your laws and I fail to measure up to your laws and I stand before you, therefore, lost and undone, hopeless and helpless.*

Is that your confession? Have you been able to acknowledge such a thing? If you have been able to make such a confession then it would be true to say of you what the New Testament says of Lydia – that the Lord has opened your heart. The walls of Jericho, spiritually speaking, have been made to fall and you've been able to say *amen* to the judgment of God on a personal level. You would never have made such a confession apart from a supernatural work of God. Our hearts are too hard and our pride is too strong. Our pride and our hard-hearted rebellion surrounded our hearts like the walls of the city of Jericho.

But the evidence that the walls have fallen is your willingness to acknowledge your sin and your worthiness of God's judgment. So the ability to say *amen* to God's judgment springs from a changed heart. But would you consider with me next that saying *amen* to God's judgment:

II. Leads to Deliverance

Notice the words of 11:31 *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

She perished not our text says. She didn't go the way of the others temporally or spiritually or eternally. Even though she had been very much a part of the culture of Jericho, she didn't perish with Jericho. It's interesting to note, isn't it, that most every time you find Rahab mentioned she's mentioned not simply as Rahab, but as Rahab the harlot.

That designation tells us that she was very much a part of the sin of Jericho. She was not an exception to the culture but was very much engaged in that sinful culture. She helped to promote it; she profited from it; she took pleasure in it and yet she perished not with them that believed not.

Doesn't her example teach us that when a heart has been opened in such a way that sin is acknowledged and God is justified then the channel is also opened for grace to freely flow to such a sinner. And nothing can stop the flow of God's grace – the extensiveness of the

sin in the city of Jericho could not keep God's grace from her and her own personal lack of morality and uprightness was no barrier to the grace of God reaching her. She certainly stands out as a monumental trophy of God's grace.

And note also from the text that even though there were no character traits to distinguish her from the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho there was, nevertheless, one very distinguishable mark that set her apart. Note again the words of the text *she perished not with them that believed not*. That statement indicates to us, doesn't it, that Rahab did believe, unlike all the other inhabitants of Jericho that believed not.

And so we have in this verse the same connection between *belief* and *perishing not* that we have in Jn. 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life*. It is not our own character qualities, you see, that keep us from perishing. Before God's law we're no better than Rahab the harlot. Faith is the distinguishing mark in Rahab and so must faith be the distinguishing mark in you and in me.

Isn't it incredible to behold how the inhabitants of Jericho perished in unbelief? Some readers of the Bible in their sentimentalism are tempted to think that innocent people perished in Jericho. That is most definitely not the case. Guilty sinners perished in Jericho and unbelievers perished in Jericho. Those that were hard in heart toward God perished in Jericho.

But the one who could say *amen* to God's judgment did not perish but was delivered. The one who could say that she deserved to perish was kept from perishing. The one who could see the righteousness of God in his judgment was delivered from that judgment. This is why I say that saying *amen* to God's judgment leads to deliverance.

In this respect we could align Rahab with an earlier character that we've already studied. Back in v. 7 of this chapter we read that – *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith*.

Didn't Noah's action say *amen* to the judgment of God? Every board that he fastened in place said that judgment was coming and that the world deserved judgment. And because of his willingness to acknowledge the truth of God's judgment he and his family experienced deliverance from that judgment.

In a sense the people of our generation should find it easy to acknowledge the truth of God's judgment. After all, we have the completed canon of Scripture. And we have the account, therefore, of God's judgment upon his Son. If there was ever anything that ought to convince us of the truth of God's judgment it would be the account of God's judgment falling upon his Son.

And what this account of God's judgment tells us is that there will be no partiality to the judgment of God. If God wouldn't show partiality to his Son in the sinner's place then you can be sure that God will show partiality to no one who stands before his judgment bar.

But just as certainly as the judgment of God's Son should impress upon us the reality of God's judgment it should also impress upon us the reality of deliverance from that judgment, if we'll but acknowledge our sins and believe in Christ.

What great lessons Rahab must have learned once she abode with the people of God. She would have been instructed in the truths of the sacrificial offerings of the Levitical priesthood. She would have learned the doctrine of substitution. She would have learned that her deliverance from judgment was due to the fact that judgment would one day fall on Christ.

And so we see, plainly, in the example of Rahab, that saying *amen* to God's judgment springs from a changed heart and saying *amen* to God's judgment leads to deliverance from that judgment. Would you consider with me finally that saying *amen* to God's judgment:

III. Demonstrates a Higher Allegiance to God than to the World

We've considered how Rahab said *amen* to the judgment of God. A time would come centuries later when the prophet Jeremiah would call on the Israelites to do the same thing. We've heard Jeremiah 21 read earlier in the service. In vv. 8,9 of that chapter we read: *And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.*

Do you see how Jeremiah presents the matter? If you will surrender to the Chaldeans your lives will be spared. Now to those within the city of Jerusalem who could see and would acknowledge that the city had fallen away from God and had become worthy of judgment – these ones would be the ones to say *amen* to the judgment of God and their lives would be spared.

We know, of course, that there were not many in Jerusalem that were willing to make such an acknowledgment. The more popular notion was that Jeremiah was a traitor to his country. And he was treated as one who was more loyal to the Babylonians than to the Jerusalem. The truth of the matter was that Jeremiah's allegiance was to God and he was only faithfully declaring what God had revealed to him.

During the last Presidential election much was made of the association between Candidate Obama and the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. We heard over and over that little sound bite in which Jeremiah Wright expressed his view that America was worthy to be damned. And oh how the conservative pundits jumped all over that statement. Here's a man running for President whose preacher had the audacity to suggest that America was worthy of damnation.

And when I heard this mantra repeated over and over again by conservative pundits it occurred to me that we find ourselves to be much in the same condition as those Israelites who considered the prophet Jeremiah to be a traitor. We're steeped in self-righteousness if

we don't think our nation is worthy of damnation. Now I'm sure I wouldn't cite the same reasons that Jeremiah Wright uses to suggest our nation is worthy of damnation. But what else is a nation worthy of that sanctions the killing of unborn babies and makes virtuous the things that God calls abominable? What is a nation worthy of that has had the privilege of a rich spiritual heritage and today has spurned that heritage and indulges in all manner of sin and vice?

Some conservative pundits, I'm sure, would argue that although our nation may seem bad, yet it's nowhere near as bad as other nations in the world. To which I would reply that a nation should be judged not merely in comparison to other nations but a nation should be judged in connection with the light that such a nation has received. And in the case of our nation, I can think of no other nation that has enjoyed the light of the gospel which has, nevertheless, sinned against that light.

We understand pagan nations indulging in the immoral practices that are associated with paganism but how much worse is a nation that has received so much light and still indulges in the same immorality as those pagan nations?

Do you remember when the Y2K scare received so much attention in our country? There were those who were completely convinced that when we reached the year 2000 the computers were going to crash and the economies of whole nations that had become so dependent on computers were certainly going to collapse. In retrospect, I believe one of the reasons that this notion gained credence among many Christians was because of their recognition that if our worst fears came to pass it would be what a sinful nation like ours deserved.

I can remember saying to Christians as the time drew near that the best spiritual preparation that could be made for Y2K was to prepare yourself to say *amen* to it if God brought such judgment upon us.

The Christian who lives by faith, you see, has a higher allegiance. His allegiance is to God and to Christ. His loyalty is to the One who rules heaven and earth and disposes of the nations as he sees fit. Rahab had experienced a change of allegiance. Our text tells us that she received the spies with peace. And Joshua 6:25 tells us that *Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.*

Her allegiance was to God and her allegiance was with the people of God. This must ever be the case for those who live by faith. This allegiance is higher and stronger than any earthly allegiance. *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me* (Mt 10:37). In the minds of some Christians this might seem like a harsh statement from Christ but the truth of the matter is that our love for Christ must be foundational for all other relationships.

In other words – if I love Christ with all my heart then I'll love my children the way I should and I'll love my wife the way I should. If I place my spouse or my children or any other relationship above loyalty and allegiance to Christ then I'll mar and hinder those

relationships. This is something that young people that are approaching the age of marriage need to keep in mind. Many a marriage ends up in failure because the strength of emotionalism leads to a distortion of priorities. Loyalty and allegiance to a future spouse becomes more important than loyalty and allegiance to Christ.

Rahab's allegiance, then, was to God and this enabled her to acknowledge that God was right in his judgment even when that judgment was unleashed upon her home town, as it were.

And so I wonder this morning – where is your allegiance? Are you able to say *amen* to God's dealings with you? Have you been able to say that you personally are a worthy subject of damnation? This is not a confession that can be made unless and until the walls of our hearts fall and our hearts become open to God's truth.

By saying *amen* to God's judgment we find deliverance from that judgment. We find deliverance from that judgment because we also say *amen* to God's judgment upon his Son in our place. And this in turn leads to the obedience of faith and to the loyalty and allegiance of that same faith.

I trust this morning that you are living by faith and if you're not I pray that the walls of Jericho will fall spiritually in your hearts so that you'll see the righteousness of God in judgment and you'll see the righteousness of God in salvation and you'll align your loyalty and allegiance with Christ in the cause of his kingdom.