

Risky Faith

Heb. 11:29-31

Series “More”

Jarrett Stephens

So far in our *MORE* series, we have outlined Hebrews 11 – the Great Hall of Faith...we have looked at the lives of various people the writer of Hebrews mentions and have highlighted and talked about their faith. We have studied what it looks to have:

- A patient faith...
- A courageous faith...
- An all-in kind of faith...
- A faith that speaks...
- A faith that holds nothing back...

And today, we are going to see what it looks like (this is the title of the message as well) to have a: **Risky Faith**

I like to inspire and be inspired. I think this is the football coach in me. And often times it is quotes from people that can fire me up, inspire and bring motivation to me on a personal level! I've ALWAYS loved and am ALWAYS looking for a good quote!

I carry a card with me in my journal and look at it nearly every day, and it has certain quotes and short sayings on it that if I need a little push, all I have to do is read that card. On the walls behind this worship center, we have different verses highlighted that are meant to bring motivation and inspire me as I walk down the hall to prepare to preach God's Word.

I like my quotes – and this week, I came across some quotes as I was studying for this message that have to do with faith and taking risks.

Here are some...they're inspiring to me...they fire me up to have a risky faith for the Lord. See what you think!

A.W. Tozer – “God never calls His people to play it safe.”

Or what about this one from Elisabeth Elliot. Elisabeth along with her husband, Jim were missionaries to the Auca Indians in Ecuador. Jim was killed by the very people he was trying to reach and two years later Elisabeth returns to the mission field and ultimately lives with the Indian tribe that killed her husband.

She learned their language so that she could share the good news of Jesus with them. Listen to what she said:

Elisabeth Elliot – “If we are to have faith, we must learn to risk – risk our comfort, our plans, even our lives – for the sake of Christ.”

Louie Giglio – “Faith and risk are inseparable. You can’t stay in the boat and walk on the water at the same time.”

Martin Luther King Jr – a preacher and the great civil rights leader of the 50’s and 60’s. Just think about what he faced – the pressure...the death threats...the desire to change the laws of the Jim Crow south. He said:

Martin Luther King Jr. – “Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

Or what about Hudson Taylor. I’m telling you if you have never read his biography, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* you need to get it and start reading it today.

Taylor was from England and sensed the call of God on his life at an early age. I think he was 17 when he sensed the Lord speaking to him about becoming a missionary (call to teenagers!).

At 21, he left the comforts of home as well as leaving behind his studies to become a doctor...he sails overseas with hardly anything to his name and begins what becomes known as *The China Inland Mission*.

His approach to missions was quite revolutionary at the time – he was the first “western” missionary to adopt the customs and adapt to the culture he was trying to reach. He dressed like the Chinese, ate like the Chinese – doesn’t sound like that big of a deal, but it was at the time!

His risky faith (to leave a place he knew for a place he did not – barely survived the five-month trip it took to get there and as soon as he landed China was thrust into a civil War.

He was responsible for recruiting and inspiring over 800 missionaries to China during his lifetime. Listen to what he wrote:

Hudson Taylor – “Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith.”

A risky faith...unless there is an element of risk, there is no need for faith.

Well, in today’s passage of scripture, we’re going to see an element of risk in all three examples the writer of Hebrews uses to encourage these Jewish believers to keep pressing ahead in their faith!

Hebrews 11:29-31 – “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.”

Three different episodes in scripture mentioned here...all three teach us something about having a “risky faith”. First:

1. A risky faith trusts God when the circumstances seem impossible

Does this not describe the crossing of the Red Sea? Let’s look at it together. Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 14.

Now, this picks up a little bit where we left off last week. Recall, Moses after 40 years in the wilderness, “by faith” goes back into Egypt and the scripture says (Heb. 11:27) – he was not afraid of king’s anger. Moses had learned in the wilderness that the only one he was to fear was God.

Pharaoh at first refuses to let the people of Israel go, but after a series of plagues where God is showing forth his power – the last is where the firstborn in the family dies IF the blood of the lamb is not put over the doorframe of the home! This is the “Passover” that the Israelites kept (Heb. 11:28) “by faith”.

Pharaoh doesn’t keep it and his firstborn dies – and you can read it in (Ex. 12:32) – it breaks him! He tells Moses, “Be gone! Get out of here and take your herds and flock with you!”

In fact, listen to what the scripture says:

Exodus 12:33 – “The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land with haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.”

So, Pharaoh lets the people go! And the Lord leads them with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, so they know the direction to go and they get all the way to the edge of the Red Sea.

It’s been several days since the Israelites have been “on the run” so to speak, and the Bible tells us that Pharaoh has a change of mind.

He’s realizing that he’s let his entire work force go! He’s also got a steep hatred for Moses because of all that has come about AND God is ALSO at work (hardening Pharaoh’s heart) – another sermon for another time – and Pharaoh decides, NOT happening. And he commands his army (the most powerful in the world at the time) to pursue the Israelites and overtake them. Let’s pick up in (v. 10).

Exodus 14:10-14 – “When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” ¹³ And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom

you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

Just think about the picture here! There is NOWHERE for the Israelites to go! If ever there was a situation that seemed impossible, this is it! This is their worst nightmare coming true.

Pharoah’s army is bearing down on one side of them, and a sea is on the other side? What are they going to do?

Robert Morgan in his little book, *The Red Sea Rules*, describes the situation in a particular picturesque way. He writes:

Robert Morgan – “The children of Israel had every reason for utter terror. They were cornered like rabbits by encircling wolves, and the dust in the distance rose up like demons. The Israelites were facing not enslavement, but the impending slaughter of their families, their little ones, their aged parents. There was no human escape.”

Have you ever felt like you were facing an impossible circumstance?

Maybe, it’s financial. You have an unexpected medical bill and insurance is denying the claim. You’re sitting at the kitchen table, doing the math and you don’t know where you are going to find the money.

Or maybe it’s relational. Peace in the marriage seems beyond impossible. Or that wayward son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter – they are so far away from the Lord, it seems like an impossibility for them to ever find their way back to God.

I don’t know what it may be for you! Is it a season of depression and the fog simply isn’t lifting. Getting back to “normal” feels impossible. Or maybe it’s career-related and you feel stuck in a job you can’t stand and the word “impossible” is written across your relationship with your boss.

Listen: We all face what can seem like impossible circumstances! And more often than not, the impossible will make us like Israel, feel fear...panic even.

- “I don’t know how I’m going to pay the bills...”
- “My body isn’t responding to this treatment...”
- “I can’t seem to dig out of this addiction...”

The question is, “When you face an impossible circumstance in life that prompts fear, will you freeze up and start whining and complaining – airing out your frustrations on God or someone else? This is what Israel did at first!

But then, look at what happened! At seemingly the last minute – and this is how it seems God works most of the time – he comes through in the last minute.

It’s been said, he’s never late, he’s right on time...and right in the nick of time, look at what God does:

Exodus 14:19-22 – “Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”

You see what happened? God got himself all up in the middle of Israel’s problem. He got in between Israel and Pharaoh’s army – and THEN, he provided a way where there was no way! He did something that had NEVER been done before! He split the sea so that the people could cross on dry land!

I love that little saying that goes like this: “Sometimes God shows up and sometimes God shows off!”

God is showing off! And what seemed like an impossible circumstance became as what I read one person say this week a “possible pathway”!

But get this: In order for the Israelites to be delivered...they had to take a step of faith. Hebrews tells us “By faith” the people crossed over the sea on dry land.

So, what’s is going to be. When you face an impossible circumstance or situation, will you let fear take over...will you cry out in anger and frustration OR will you simply take a step of faith in the direction God leads?

That was a “risky faith” to walk through a wall of water – they passed THROUGH the Red Sea.

Oswald J. Smith – “There are three degrees of faith. First, there is the faith that receives. Like beggars, we receive Christ. There is the faith that reckons, that counts upon God to fulfill his promise whether we do anything or not. And third is the faith that risks. This faith believes God’s promises and also dares to do something for the Lord.”

All these Israelites had was a promise from the Lord. And when the Sea opened up, they “by faith” began to walk.

There are some scholars that believe the sea may not have even opened up all at once, but instead was pushed back as they put one step in front of the other!

I don’t know...could be possible...THIS IS the Christian life! It’s a step by step, one foot in front of the other, day by day kind of faith that gets us THROUGH.

So, listen: You want to exhibit a risky faith: Trust God when the circumstances seem impossible. He WILL make a way when there seems to be no way, it just may require you to take a step before he reveals it! Risky faith takes a step BEFORE it sees the miracle!

2. A risky faith trusts God when the command seems illogical

This plays off last week a little bit. We talked about a faith that believes and obeys even when whatever is commanded sounds crazy to us and looks crazy to the world! Well, more of the same today.

A risky faith trusts God when the command seems illogical – when what is asked, on the surface, doesn't even appear to make sense.

Look with me at: **Heb. 11:30 – “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.”**

Now, fast-forward 40 years since this scene at the Red Sea. Moses has passed away, and he has left in charge of Israel a man named, Joshua. You should read the book named after him sometime. I've told you before you are going to get to heaven and these people who wrote these books are going to ask you if you read their book – you do NOT want to be caught off guard! Ha!

Here's the thing about Joshua...the dude was a WARRIOR. He has led Israel's army- he was one of the first Mossad agents if you will!

Remember – Moses sent him and Caleb into the Promised Land along with ten other spies to scope it out...they came back and Joshua and Caleb were like, “we can do this!”, but the other spies got all scared...as a result the people of Israel wander in the wilderness for 40 years because of their lack of faith and trust in God – there's a lesson there!

It's this Joshua that serves as Moses's successor. He's a leader. He's a warrior...and he is the one that God taps to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land.

Here's the deal though: the first city they are to conquer is city called Jericho – and Jericho ain't no joke!

It's a walled city. And its walls were MASSIVE – we're talking 46 feet high in some places...they had around 500 soldiers defending it at any given time and they've got the advantage! They are secure within their gates AND they have coverage from the top – this is where the soldiers would stand guard and watch for any trespassers or the threat of incoming army.

Israel is commanded by God to take this city and check out HOW they are to take it! With a battering ram? With impressive weaponry and fighting skills?

Listen to this...talk about illogical? We go back to Joshua 6.

Joshua 6:1-5 – “Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. ² And the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho

into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. ³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."

Do you see how crazy that is? Do you hear how illogical this sounds? "Joshua, you are going to take the city, but here's how it's going to happen...we're not going to send warriors, we're going to send the band!

Now, look...NOTHING against a band and musicians...but if we're playing football and a national championship is on the line – you send out your gamers – you don't send out the marching band – and I know all you A&M people are thinking, "our band could handle it!" Ha! No, it couldn't!

This is essentially what is being commanded here. It makes NO SENSE on the surface, but that's exactly what happens. Joshua obeys the command of the Lord, does EXACTLY as he is told and dang if when the band doesn't play, the walls come down JUST as God said they would! Absolutely amazing.

Now, we're talking about a risky faith here - what did Joshua risk in doing this?

Well, he for sure risked his and Israel's reputation. It had to look silly to those guards up on the walls of Jericho watching them march around in silence every day. What if it didn't work out the way God planned...there was an inherent risk in walking and not fighting – but Joshua didn't care!

He risked his reputation...if it doesn't work out, his neck is on the line. He risked Israel's reputation. What God commanded seemed illogical, but "risky faith" trusts God EVEN when what is commanded seems illogical...even when what's commanded doesn't add up...doesn't make sense on the surface.

Look, we could take our Bibles and look at a number of commands that God makes of us that on the surface seem illogical. For example:

Well, let's just start with prayer. So, a need comes up...a problem arises...what do Christians do? We pray...we call out to God – on the surface, that sometimes seems crazy. That's at least what the world thinks – prayer is illogical. We hear it when there is gun violence or abuse or war – the world says, "I don't want to hear about you praying – we need MORE than prayer".

Or what about the command to "love our enemies" and forgive those that have betrayed us or hurt us" – what? Love the very ones that hate us. Forgive the ones that caused such hurt and damage? Sounds crazy!

Or what about tithing? Talk about bringing something up that on the surface sounds illogical?!
Tithe – give a tenth of your income to support the work of Christ in your local church. Give 10% and live off the other 90% - doesn't add up!

We could go on and on and one...count it joy when you suffer (James 1). Deny yourself (Luke 9) – we have commands all throughout scripture that on the surface sounds so illogical.

BUT... “risky faith” says, I am going to trust God even when everything is not lining up...even when it doesn't make sense – and what we will find is that what often times seems illogical to us seems very reasonable to God!

God's strategy sometimes looks dumb and feels overly simplistic UNTIL it works...and it ALWAYS works.

Illus. WAZE – you put an address in...and it has you turning down crazy streets...looks so out of the way...doesn't appear logical at all, and then all of the sudden, you're there! You didn't have to wait in traffic!

That's the Lord! He's the heavenly WAZE app. Will you trust God when he commands you to do something that seems illogical?

- You need sleep – wake up an hour early and spend time with me, the Lord whispers!
- Sharing Christ with that person – there is no way they will listen...they want NOTHING to do with you, Lord! – just give me a try, Jesus says!

Illus. Barnabus/Mary – (tell story) – in both cases, on the surface, it's illogical, but a risky faith says, “I'm trusting...I'm going to do what you tell me to do, Lord.

The Bible says that it was “by faith” that the walls came down...and just a point of interest here. I was talking with a buddy of mine about this text and he brought up that the word “faith” is the word “pistis” – same word as we translate the word “believe” –

Meaning: at the core of trust IS faith. Faith...it's acting on what you believe EVEN when the outcome is uncertain.

So, a risky faith trusts God when the circumstances seem impossible. A risky faith trusts God when the command seems illogical. And third and finally:

3. A risky faith trusts God when the cost seems unbearable

Now, before we leave Jericho, I need to tell you about someone. Before Joshua and Israel circled those walls, before they blew those trumpets, Joshua (as mentioned) sent spies into the city. And those spies met a woman by the name of Rahab.

Now, this is a fascinating story. Interesting note: Hebrews 11 names ONLY two women in the whole chapter. Sarah, Abraham's wife – and Rahab, the harlot...the prostitute.

Heb. 11:31 – “By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”

Rahab had A LOT working against her!

First of all, she was a Canaanite – she was pagan to the core. Second, she was a woman who didn't have many rights in that day in the first place. Third, she was a prostitute. That's like three strikes and you're out territory!

And yet, look at what she did - “by faith”. She gave a friendly welcome to the Israelite spies...to the people that were going to overthrow and conquer “her” people, she gave aid and help to.

Joshua 2:1-6 – “And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. ² And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” ³ Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” ⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. ⁵ And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” ⁶ But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.”

Rahab at this point is a defector. She's switched sides. She lies to the King – what on earth prompted all this? We can see a little bit in the conversation she had with the spies while she was covering for them.

Joshua 2:8-11 – “Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof ⁹ and said to the men, “I know that the LORD (notice that! She uses God's covenant name!) has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. ¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.”

Rahab “by faith” made a decision to act on what limited knowledge she had. She didn't fully know who Israel's God was...but she knew enough to take a small step of faith!

And talk about costs! She is risking her life here! If the king found out she lied to him, she's done! If he finds out she's hiding them, it's over for Rahab. Add to that – Rahab makes a deal

with these Israeli spies that when they come back and conquer Jericho, that they will spare her life and the life of her family. They agree to it, but she doesn't know if they will keep their word.

Rahab makes this decision that is completely by faith – she has NO IDEA how this is all going to turn out and ONE misstep...ONE hiccup...her life her family are GONERS! Death!

And yet, Rahab makes the decision DESPITE the costs to trust a God she really doesn't even know – that's faith!

It's SUCH faith that James uses her as an example in (James 2:25) as someone who has a faith that works – a justified faith! For goodness' sake, Rahab ends up marrying a man named Salmon (some even think it could have been one of the spies – that'd be cool!), and they have a baby named Boaz who eventually marries Ruth – and trace the genealogy, where does it end up? In the manger – Jesus comes from Rahab's genealogy – AMAZING!

I'd say in all these situations the "risky faith" paid off!

Church, here's the beautiful truth: When you're following our God, there really isn't any risk at all! The risk is in NOT following Him, NOT trusting Him - that's where the real danger is!

So whatever God is calling you to today:

- even if the circumstance seems impossible...
- even if the command seems illogical...
- even if the cost seems unbearable...

Take the step. Make the move. The One who parted the Red Sea, who brought down Jericho's walls, who saved a Canaanite prostitute and put her in the lineage of Jesus - that same God is with you. Let's live a risky faith.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.