



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

HEROES FROM HEBREWS



Faith in a God Who Delivers

Hebrews 11:29

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If you don't know who I am, my name is Nick Gerken. I'm the son of Michelle and Tim Gerken, and I am the intern under Jeremy Anderson for the junior high group. We have a lot of fun. They've given me the endearing name of just "Intern." That's all they call me. So, if you ever hear them chanting, "Intern," they're talking about me. They're probably yelling at me for something.

I've been given the opportunity to open the Word of God, to study and preach, seeing what God has for us and for this church. If you would, please open your Bible to Hebrews 11:29.

You're probably wondering why I have this broomstick up here. It's not going to turn into a snake like Moses' and I'm not going to start swinging it around or send it into the crowd like a javelin. Although if I see someone sleeping in the back, I might. I had a professor at Moody I really enjoyed. Every time I went to class, I never knew what was going to happen. He would also have some strange illustrations, or he'd call on students.

One of the things he would do is every time he wanted to make a point, or if we were learning something in Scripture and a principle came up that went beyond the text—and he wanted it to resonate in our lives—he would grab a chair, place it in the center of the stage, then stand on it to get our attention. Then he would give his proclamation or point. It was something he did to help us remember. So, I'll use his method, grabbing this stick every once in a while, and holding it up. When I believe the text is saying something our church needs to hear today, I might grab the stick to grab your attention.

Let's read Hebrews 11:29 now.

²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

Last week, Jon Culver taught the verse right before this, giving us the context of Hebrews 11. This chapter is unique in this way. The book was written to a group of persecuted Christians. They were being put in prison unjustly. They were experiencing all sorts of discouragement. The author of Hebrews writes this letter to encourage them, to show them how to live this life of faith. He focuses in the first part of Hebrews on Who Christ is. He is the better Messiah or the better High Priest. He's a better law giver. Then he moves into how we are to live this faith walk with endurance. We see where he addresses this in chapter ten. He says, "You are in need of endurance, not to shrink back from this life of faith." In chapter 11, his solution is to go back to the Old Testament and pick out people who showed some sort of extraordinary faith in dire and sometimes impossible circumstances.

The author is using their lives as a form of inspiration for those who were reading his letter. Chapter 12 begins with *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...."* If they could walk this life of faith and do it in the difficult circumstances in which they lived, then we also can walk in faith. We don't have to shrink back during persecution. We too can put our faith in God and see Him do the rest.

With that in mind, we're going to focus on the crossing of the Red Sea, that classic Sunday School story about which two amazing movies have been made: *The Ten Commandments*, and then for my generation, *The Prince of Egypt*. We often think because we've seen those movies that we already know the story. But I want you to take off your Sunday School cap, take off what you believe

you know about this portion of Scripture and lay all of that aside. Sometimes it can be childish, and we forget the little details that end up being very important.

Let's go to Exodus 14 to see why the author of Hebrews decided to add the Israelites to a list of those commended for their faith. Also, we'll see three steps we must take to experience God's deliverance in difficult circumstances. In this chapter, we find that the Israelites have just left Egypt. Moses had been told to go to Pharaoh and say, "Let the Hebrew people go, so that they may worship God." God would then bring them into the Promised Land—a promise they had been waiting for all the way through Genesis into Exodus, and God's timing was now.

Pharaoh however would not let the people go, so God sent plague after plague after plague after plague as a form of judgment, until Pharaoh finally relented and let the people go. He eventually said, "Fine—get out of here," so the people left. They were being led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. That alone is just amazing. I wish God would guide me in that way. "Nick, I want you to go over to that person, because there's a pillar of fire above them." It would be much easier.

That's where we find the Israelites in this chapter. We'll start reading in Exodus 14:1, talking about the story as we go.

Then the Lord said to Moses,² "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea."³ For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.'⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so.

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"⁶ So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him,⁷ and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.⁸ And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly.⁹ The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

We see here that God is setting the stage to do something. The Israelites don't know this. They're just following this pillar and following Moses. But behind the scenes, God is setting the stage by doing two things. First, He puts the Israelites in a vulnerable position. The area where God had led them was like a beach. Behind them were some mountains with a trail snaking through them. So, three million people would have been on the beach and the only exit—the only real way out—would have been through that small passage. God filters all these people into this area, then He says, "I'm about to do something."

Second, God sends Pharaoh after them. This was literally putting the Israelites between a rock and a hard place. It would not have been hard for God to harden Pharaoh's heart to pursue them. As we know, Pharaoh soon regretted releasing them. He probably realized he had been humiliated—almost emasculated. Here was a man who believed he was a god, reigning over the most powerful and advanced nation in that day. But suddenly a man came up to him and demanded that he let the people go. God sent plague after plague and Pharaoh and his servants and magicians could not keep up. Finally, God proved that He was superior over the most powerful king in the world. That was a reason for Pharaoh to feel humiliated.

Also, Pharaoh realized he had released all those slaves—all the people who were in his workforce were no longer there. Can you imagine what that did to Egypt's economy? Can you imagine the chaos the nation was going through? All the people who were working were now gone.

Also, while the Israelites were leaving, Scripture says they plundered Egypt. When they were leaving, they asked the Egyptians for silver and gold, as well as some livestock. The Egyptians were so eager to get the Israelites out of their country, they gladly gave them what they asked for. They feared that if the Israelites stayed, they would all die. They knew God could keep sending more plagues.

I imagine with all this that Pharaoh was furious and now wanted to show his power to the Israelites, to get glory over them. But God had a different plan. He was going to get final glory over Pharaoh. This is how God set the stage. He also was in the process of breaking down every place where the Israelites could put their faith other than in Himself. He removed their security, entrapping them in the wilderness, and making them easy prey for the Egyptians. God was knocking down everything else they might seek to put their faith in.

Let's read on to see how the Israelites responded to their circumstances.

¹⁰ 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."

When the Israelites realized the position they were in and when they saw the armies of Egypt coming after them, it says they started doing the right thing: They cried out to the Lord. We do the same thing. When our circumstances go awry, the first thing we do is say, "God, please save me from this. I can't do this anymore—it has to be You."

But very quickly, just like the Israelites, that plea for help can turn to complaining, regret, fear, anxiety and despair. Then it turns to blaming other people. God puts us in these circumstances and we don't know why. Things seem to be going great, then suddenly, half our coworkers don't show up to work and everything is going crazy. The first thing we want to do is complain to somebody else. We regret coming into work—or even taking this job. We wish we would have kept our old job. We start blaming other people for the place we're in. We're no different from the Israelites.

But we need to look at Moses' proclamation to the Israelites, because it has something to teach us as well. Moses' remedy for their fear and anxiety and the panic that was drowning them was a change in attitude and a change in attention. He said, "Be silent," instead of complaining. He said, "Fear not," instead of despairing or fearing the worst.

He said, "Stand firm," instead of regretting and wishing to go back. They were thinking, "Egypt was better than this. We're going to die here. Being enslaved is better than dying." But Moses said, "Stand firm where God has placed you." Then lastly, "Look and see the salvation of the Lord instead of looking to other people and blaming them for the problem."

Three steps we must take to experience God's deliverance in difficult circumstances.

Church, I've got my stick. I think we can say with confidence that when our circumstances turn sour, it's not evidence that God is angry. It's not evidence that He's punishing us or that He's absent. Rather, it is evidence that God is active. He's working in the background.

What would our lives look like if we started looking at ourselves differently, like Moses wants us to look at our lives? What if, when circumstances seem to be going wrong—when everything seems to be going wrong—instead of complaining and regretting and despairing and blaming others, we say, "I'm going to wait to see how this plays out. When things are going wrong, God must be on the move." Let's start living with that attitude.

This entire week God has been nailing me with all these problems, and I'm thinking, "I've got to preach my own outline to myself this week. God, You're teaching me so I can teach others."

Identify the object of our faith.

Like the Israelites, let's move our focus. Let's identify the object of our faith as being God, instead of focusing on our circumstances. When the Israelites put their attention on God, they were ready to trust His provision and they were allowed to witness an amazing feat of power and majesty. Let's look now at the rest of Exodus 14:

¹⁵ The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶ Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

¹⁹ 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. ²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴ And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, ²⁵ clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen."²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea.²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained.²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.³¹ Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

This is where we see the faith of the Israelites. The Egyptians are behind them. There's a wall of fire, a pillar of cloud behind them, and in front of them are these walls of water. There's now salvation where there had not been salvation before.

We need to trust in God's provision.

If we are to experience God's deliverance in difficult circumstances, just like the Israelites we need to trust in God's provision. The Israelites put their faith in God's ability to save them as they walked through the Red Sea. The walking part wasn't the hard part. Their faith wasn't commended because they figured out how to walk. Their faith was commended because of the circumstance, because of how terrifying it would have been to go through the waters. It wasn't a small task. The Red Sea wasn't just a puddle of water they had to walk through in fear of getting wet, or some creek they were trying to jump over. This was a sea with a wall of water on both sides of a path through it.

The place where scholars believe the Israelites crossed the Red Sea would have been about 11 miles wide. That meant they walked for 11 miles between two walls of water. That would be about the same distance between this campus and the Aurora campus and back. Or say you drive over to 47, get out of your car and walk down 47 all the way to the bridge in Yorkville—that is the distance we're talking about. That's how far they walked in fear and trembling before the Lord.

The depth of the sea would have been about 830 meters. That's seven football fields high of water piled up on either side of them, while they had 11 miles to walk. Can you imagine the fear of the Israelites as they're walking through that? This was God's provision, but at any moment, thousands and thousands of gallons of water could come down and crush them if their God decided to give up on them.

Does that not put into perspective the faith the Israelites needed to walk into the midst of the sea? There was nothing they did to deserve this. They dropped the ball earlier. They had no confidence in God but were complaining and blaming His servant Moses. At this point there were no ritual sacrifices. There were no works involved. There was nothing that put them in favor with God. There was nothing about which they could say, "We did this, so You need to be faithful on Your side of the bargain and split the sea for us." No. It was just God holding back the sea. Then by faith they trusted—and that was enough. They trusted that God would be faithful.

Believe it or not, we actually show a similar faith every day. Most of us here didn't drive on the way to church—we had somebody else drive. When you get in a car or in a plane to go somewhere, you are putting your faith in another's ability to drive (or fly) and get us to the destination. You are subject to their decisions. That can be terrifying. Several of us were saying to the driver (or at least thinking), "Watch the road. I'm putting my life in your hands." That's just a small illustration of the faith we show today. But believe it or not, the crossing of the Red Sea was in itself an illustration and a foreshadowing of the salvation we receive here today.

Let me get my stick again. We are stuck between a rock and a hard place. We have our sin on one side and God's just judgment upon us on the other side. There's no escape. Romans 6:23 says, "*For the wages of sin is death...*" and Romans 3:23 says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" We all find ourselves between a rock and a hard place.

Then suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, God gives us a Deliverer—and He does it in the strangest way. He sends a little boy down, Jesus Christ, to grow into a man and die on a cross to give us life. He spent three days in the grave, then He rose from the grave. It says He tramples sin and death. When Jesus was at Calvary and had His arms stretched wide on the cross, the veil in the temple split and now we have access, not only to freedom and forgiveness, but into the very presence of God, into a relationship with Him. All He asks of us is to believe that His deliverance is enough, to believe that God's death on the cross is sufficient, then to repent, to turn and walk away from our sin. Believe, repent and put our faith in Jesus Christ—that's all we're required to do. Is that not just an amazing parallel that we see in Scripture?

Church, if God can be faithful and handle the salvation and deliverance of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, is He not able to deliver us in our circumstances, in the small things in our lives that seem to be going awry? If He's able to part the Red Sea and able to accomplish our salvation—both by doing something unusual and unnatural—He can handle our circumstances as well.

Give God the glory.

Maybe the way God delivers us is not what we expect. He does this often. He puts us in a circumstance and the way of deliverance seems obvious to us. The Israelites were probably thinking, "Just strike the Egyptians dead, God." But God did it in a way that was so unusual, so unorthodox. The reason is so He can get the glory.

Sometimes God isn't the "way out," but instead is the "way through." Sometimes God doesn't deliver us by splitting the Red Sea and giving us an escape. Rather, He gives us the strength and perseverance to get through our trial. James talks extensively on this. He writes in James 1:2-3, *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."*

Often His ways are unexpected and we can't understand what He's doing. The way He chooses to deliver us may seem odd and even where we end up might seem odd as well. But He does it for His glory, because God absolutely loves to deliver His people in unique, unorthodox, and even strange ways.

We don't have to look very far into Exodus—only three chapters later—to see God deliver them three more times. The Israelites are in the desert and have no food with them. Instead of telling them to go hunting, God sends manna to fall from heaven, and says, "Here you go. Every day, I'm going to send manna from heaven and all you have to do is eat what you need. Don't collect extra, because I'll send more tomorrow." Bread from heaven! I wish God would do that for me. I love bread.

He also gives them water when they had no water. They are wandering in the desert, and they start to complain. "We're going to die of thirst out here." God says, "Hey, Moses, go talk to that rock and water will flow out of it." "A rock? You want me to go talk to an inanimate object and it will produce...what? That doesn't even make sense." Then Moses talks to the rock and out comes water. Later on, we see Moses striking a rock and again, out comes water.

Then the Israelites face the Amalekites. They're unready—they have no military training. But God says, "Moses, I want you to go stand on a cliff and watch the battle as it's ensuing. Just lift your staff above your head. As long as it's above your head, I will give you victory. If you put it down, you'll lose, but if you keep it above your head, I'll give you victory." What? He didn't give them combat training or any sort of preparation. No, all He said was, "I'm going to do this in such a way that I'm going to get the glory from it." That's why God does things this way.

He saves us in such miraculous ways because He wants the glory. He doesn't want anyone else to think it was the Egyptians that saved them. He doesn't want us to think the Israelites somehow saved themselves. He doesn't even want the people to think what He did was a natural phenomenon, like people could just walk across the Red Sea because someone built a bridge over it. No. God says, "I'm going to build two walls around you and I'm going to lead you through. And then I'm going to crush the Egyptians when they go through. Why? Because I am going to get glory from it." That's why God does His work this way.

Glory is a big theme in Exodus 14. In verse four we read, *"I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."* In verse 17 He does this again: *"I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."* Jump to verse 23:

The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

The very thing that Moses proclaimed to the Israelites— "God will fight for you" —came out of the mouths even of the Egyptians. *"The Lord is fighting for them."* It wasn't the Israelites they were afraid of. They said, *"Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them."*

Church, the Lord is fighting for us. In our circumstances that He Himself has put into place, He is ready to fight for us and He will receive the glory from it. We see that this glory not only came from the mouths of the Egyptians, but later in Exodus 15, we read this in verses 14-16: *"The peoples have heard; they tremble; pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Now are the chiefs of Edom*

dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone....”

After the Israelites had crossed the sea, they looked back at where they had been—realizing the difficult circumstance they had been in from which God delivered them—and they praised and worshipped God. In that praise and worship, it says not only did the Israelites and the Egyptians get to see the glory, but the rest of the world got to see the glory of God. They got to know Who the Lord is.

We know this is true, because later we’re going to talk about Rahab. The Israelites are coming, and the spies meet Rahab. The people in Jericho already know about their God—they’ve heard what He did at the Red Sea and how He saved them. The entire city was shaking—they were terrified of Him. It wasn’t because they were afraid of the Israelites; they were afraid of the God of Israel Who was coming with them. They knew He was a God Who fights for His people.

Two things we can learn from this story.

When God does the work of delivering His people, the world will know His name.

God doesn’t put us in our circumstances and then provide deliverance from them simply so we will worship, but rather that the world will know Who He is. He does these things as a witness to His own power.

When God does the work of delivering His people, we need to give Him the glory.

If we are to experience God’s deliverance in the same way the Israelites experienced it—in our difficult or even impossible circumstances—we need to give God the glory.

Have you ever heard of George Mueller? He was an evangelist who opened orphanages in England in the 1800s. He had this amazing faith—an unbelievable faith. I remember reading about him years ago and was completely in awe as I read story after story about his faith. There were hundreds of children in his orphanage, and he woke up early one morning to learn that there was no food to feed them, nor was there money to buy food. George Mueller could have complained, or he could have regretted taking this job. He could have started blaming someone, maybe blaming the orphans for stealing food in the middle of the night. But instead, he lived his life in faith.

This is a true story. He said, “Bring the children to the tables.” Then he told the children, “You can’t be late for school today, so let’s pray, then let’s eat.” But there was nothing on the tables. He prayed, “Father, thank You for everything You have already provided for us and thank You for what You will provide for us to eat.” After he said amen, there was a knock at the door. He opened the door and there was the local baker. He said, “I don’t know what it is, but last night God gave me a dream. He told me He wanted me to make bread for you for today. So, I have all this bread I was making all night and God told me to give it to you. Do you need bread?” George told him, “Yes!”

He closed the door and started handing out the bread. Then there was another knock at the door. He opened the door and it was the milkman. He said, “My carriage broke down in front of your orphanage and it’s going to be too late by the time I can fix it to deliver all this milk. It’s going to spoil. Could you use some milk?” This is a true story of God’s provision.

George Mueller was quoted as saying, “Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man’s power ends.” George Mueller was a man who lived his life in faith and gave all the glory to God.

Today we’re celebrating baptisms, which is when we look back and celebrate what God has done in the lives of those being baptized, in the circumstances of their deliverance. We give Him the glory and are obedient to Him by being baptized. I want to encourage you to do this. In whatever circumstance you may find yourself—this week or later—identify God as the object of your faith. Turn your attitude and your attention to Him, instead of whatever solutions you might feel like pursuing. Turn your attention to Him, watch Him provide, then trust in that provision, no matter how strange it may seem. And then when all is said and done and God has delivered you, give Him the glory. It wasn’t just circumstance. It wasn’t happenstance. It wasn’t luck. Things didn’t just work themselves out. God is the One Who delivered you, because He works all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).