

I've given today's message the title, "Actions of Faith".

Today's the third week we're spending in Hebrews 11 (that magnificent chapter on "faith"). And as I said last week:

It lists out all of the heroes of the Old Testament, and the faith that they had; and the great things that God did through them, because of their faith...

But the main point isn't "faith". The main point, is that we have something better in store. It's much better than anything this life has to offer.

We:

- have a better:
  - country
  - homeland
  - destination
  - city

And we:

- rise to a better life

It is the promise of God, that we cannot yet see, but by faith, we believe it; we know it; and we live in a way that gives evidence to what we believe.

So, let's talk about "actions of faith", and some **specific** actions of faith.

1.

The first example is “doing what’s right – obeying the commandments of God, even when it is against the law to do so”.

One of the principles of Godly living, is to live as good citizens in this world – that is, to obey the laws of the land. But, there will be times when the laws of the land, **conflict** with the laws of God. And when a law of the land requires you or I to personally break a law of God, then as Disciples of Jesus, it is essential for us to remain faithful to God.  
*Christians aren’t always goody-goody-two-shoes, you know.*

And we remain obedient to God, knowing full well, that the full weight of the law, might come down upon us. We might find ourselves on the wrong side of the law, and that might put us on the wrong side of a prison door... BTW, that doesn’t mean we take up arms in a revolution. We simply count it as a cost of discipleship (to suffer for our faith).

And there’s a couple of examples here. The first is Moses’ parents and the Hebrew Midwives.

Let me set the scene:

The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. And God was blessing his people. They were increasing in number, and Egyptians were starting to get worried, that the population of the people of Israel would grow to a stage where they were too powerful for them to contain.

And so, Pharoah told the midwives to kill all the Hebrew baby boys as they were born. But the midwives feared God, so they disobeyed the command of Pharoah (“The Hebrew women

aren't like the Egyptian women. They just pop them out before we get there").

So Pharaoh ordered that every Hebrew baby boy was to be drowned in the river.

But Moses' parents disobeyed. They hid their little boy Moses, in a floating basket of reeds, and he survived. In fact, the daughter of Pharaoh found the basket, and took Moses as her own.

Another example is Daniel, Shadrach; Meshach; and Abednego. These 4 young Hebrew men had been brought as captives from Israel, to the land of Babylon. And there in the land of Babylon, they served their captors. And they did it well – their service was exemplary.

They were serving a pagan King (King Nebuchadnezzar). And they obeyed the King (even though they were as good as slaves). They had no rights; no freedoms... But they honoured God, by being obedient to the king.

And we can learn from this: No rights; No freedoms, but honour God by being obedient to our rulers... (Romans 12&13; 1 Peter 2; Titus 3)

But there was a limit to their obedience. When the King ordered them to do something that would cause them to personally disobey God, they disobeyed the King, to do what was right in the eyes of God.

At one point, it appears that king Nebuchadnezzar wanted to have some kind of unified national god – a god for all the people in Babylon to worship together, and so he had a statue of gold constructed, and made a command that everyone from every land/creed, had to worship it. And he made a law, “When you hear the music play, you have to bow down and worship the statue... If you don’t, you’ll be thrown into the fiery furnace”...

And one day, the music played, and all the people nearby, bowed down and worshipped the statue. But there were 3 men, who did not.

Shadrach; Meshach; and Abednego. And they were hauled in to King Nebuchadnezzar, and he had words with them. He gave them a personal warning, and said, “If you do not worship this image, you will be thrown into the fire.”

Now, hear their response of faith:

Daniel 3:16-18 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If this be so, (if you throw us into the fire) our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Alright, let’s be specific, about what their faith was saying:

- We are **not** going to worship your god, because there is only **one** true God Whom it is right to worship.
- our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, alright, so they had absolute faith that God had the power to do it – They fully believed that God had the power...
- And they fully believed that God **would** deliver them out of the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. You see, even if they were to die in the fire, they are delivered into the hands of God...
- But even if, in the sovereignty of God, He chooses to let them die as martyrs in the fire, they will remain faithful to God, no matter what the cost...

And Nebuchadnezzar was so angry, he ordered the furnace be heated to 7 times its normal temperature... It was so hot, the elite soldiers (mighty men) who threw them into the fire, were themselves killed by the blast of the furnace (even after they'd put on all their protective gear).

But Shadrach; Meshach; and Abednego met with an angel in the fire. And when they came out of the furnace, they didn't even have the smell of smoke on them.

Then there was Daniel. Two kings after Nebuchadnezzar, was "Darius". And Darius thought a lot of Daniel (Daniel was distinguished above all of the other high officials). And that caused a bit of jealousy amongst Darius' minions, and so they came up with a cunning plan.

They knew that Daniel would be loyal to the King, but they also knew, that he would be more loyal to God. And so they suggested something to King Darius: to make a law, that for the next 30 days, no petition/request/prayer could be made to any man/God, other than the King... The penalty:- “*Whiskers*” you become cat-food (fed to the lions).

It’s only for 30 days, right???

Did Daniel obey? No. He knew that the legislation had been signed into law, but he went to his room, he opened his window, and he prayed. He did it 3 times a day (as was his practice)...

Now, when Daniel’s crime was reported, Darius realised it had been a trap, and he didn’t want to throw Daniel into the lion’s den. But he felt he had to – that he couldn’t look weak by going back on his word...

And as Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den, Darius broke the law himself. He prayed: **May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you.** And in the morning, Daniel was well. God had sent an angel to hold shut the mouths of the lions.

What’s going on here?

There are times, when a ruler of the land might make a law, that if we obey that law, it would cause us to break a commandment of God... When that happens, what will we do??? Well, it’s a no-brainer.

Will we do:

- what God says; Or
- what the Government says???

One of these has eternal ramifications; the other does not.  
And so, we obey God, of course.

Now, for Daniel, Shadrach; Meshach; and Abednego, the punishment would have been death. But by faith, they remained faithful to God. They did not bow down to a false God. And Daniel continued to pray to the one true God...

But for you and I, knowing where to draw the line (in civil disobedience), is a hard thing... You see, human nature means “We don’t like to be told what to do”. And sometimes if the government tells us to do something that we don’t want to do, we get all self-righteous and decide “I’m going to honour God by disobeying them”...

But, have they commanded us, to personally break a law of God?

Or is it just something we don’t want to do?

During Covid and since Covid, I’ve heard a lot of people/Christians make a lot of claims about our rights and our freedoms, and how we should follow the example of Daniel, Shadrach; Meshach; and Abednego and **stand up** for our rights and freedoms...

And yet Daniel and his mates did nothing of the sort. They didn’t stand up for rights/freedoms. They were as good as

slaves – very well respected slaves, but they were well respected and valued for a reason:

Because they:

- humbly served their captors; and
  - didn't spit in their dinner; and
  - didn't stand up for their rights...
- 
- were quite subservient...

You see, if the government tells me to do something I don't like... Even if they take away my "rights" and my "freedoms", this in itself, isn't an issue of faith – it's an issue of democratic process and politics...

But when there **is** an issue of faith – when they tell me to **disobey** God, that's a different matter entirely.

I think our governments came very close to this, when they forbid Christians from meeting together (for a while)... But they didn't forbid worship altogether. For a short while, we could continue worshipping:

- as families;
- over the phone;
- on line;
- as we went for a walk together with another person (under the guise of exercise)...

And you might draw the line in a different spot, but for me, it came very close...

But the point is, we do have laws (today), that if we obey them, we break God's law...



For me, an obvious one is “truth”. We must not tell lies. God’s word tells us, that all liars will end up in the lake of fire... And yet, a law in our land (that’s currently being tested in the courts), says that if a man decides to be a woman, then he **is** a woman, and I am not allowed to say that he is a man. They have legislated, that I have to lie and refer to him as a woman. To be faithful to God, I cannot do that.

Likewise, some people may be so offended by the Gospel, that they claim, it is “hate speech”. And we are increasingly becoming a community, where to proclaim that all are sinners in need of a saviour, may be seen as hate-speech, and not tolerated.

So, do we obey the laws of the land and not preach the whole of the Gospel? No. By faith, we obey God, and we proclaim the good news, no matter what the cost.

## 2.

A second action of faith, is to pick-a-side.

When it comes to being a Disciple of Jesus, we’re either in, or we’re out. We can’t have a foot in both camps.

Think of Moses. He was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter. He was as good as royalty, but he **refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter** . And he chose rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the easy life.

He picked a side (you see). And he left Egypt (not being afraid of the anger of the king)...

And think of Rahab. She picked a side. She was not a Hebrew, she was a prostitute, who lived in a house that formed part of the defensive wall of Jericho. But she knew that God was with the people of Israel, and so she picked a side. And she hid the Hebrew spies when they came to Jericho. And when the walls of Jericho fell, her house was the only part of that wall that remained standing...

There are times when picking-a-side, will be a matter of words:, where there might be a discussion, tearing down God / blaspheming Jesus... Will we be the ones who pick-a-side? Even though it's not popular, will we pick-a-side and proclaim the goodness and majesty of our Lord?

There will be times when picking-a-side, is a matter of actions... When others are doing what is expedient, will we do what is Godly?...

And there will be times when picking-a-side, is a choice of suffering over prosperity.

### 3.

Which brings us to our third point:

Choosing the hard way. By faith, we choose the hard way.

Moses could have chosen a life of luxury and power. But instead, he chose to be mistreated. And Jesus taught us that to be His disciple, is hard road. It is not the easy way.

## Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

And we'll talk more about travelling the difficult road next week, when we learn more about suffering for our faith.

4.  
Fourthly, by faith, we are saved.

The example we have, is the Passover.

Pharoah refused to let the People of God leave Egypt. And God sent plague after plague after plague, and yet Pharoah still refused to let the people leave.

The final plague, was to be the plague of death. And God told Moses, for each family to kill a lamb and roast it for dinner; And to take the blood of the lamb, to paint it on the lintels of the door. And when the angel of death went through the land (that night), he passed over every door that had the blood of the lamb on it.

And so the people were saved from death.

The imagery that Hebrews is using, is the sprinkling of the blood. And through chapters 9 and 10, it's already been telling us, that the Blood of Jesus, is more powerful than this...

By the blood of Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and our consciences are left with no guilt.

And by faith, we know that we are saved from death, by the blood of Jesus.

Just as the people of Israel were saved from death and were saved out of the land of Egypt by the blood of the lamb, we are saved from death to life – We are saved from this world, to the life that is to come, through the blood of Jesus...

... By Faith ...

### **Because:**

- we are saved by the blood of Jesus;
- we look forward to the life that is to come,

### **By faith:**

- we follow God and keep His commands (no matter what the cost);
- we pick a side –  
We make a choice “I choose Jesus. I will be faithful to Him”.
- we choose the hard way

because, by Faith, we are saved.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,  
We thank You for Your Salvation.

We thank You,  
that by the blood of Jesus, we are saved.

What a privilege/honour,  
to become the beloved of God.

And Lord, our prayer today,  
is that for us,  
faith wouldn't just be about what we believe,  
but that we would be known for actions of faith.

That we would honour You and obey You,  
no matter what the cost.

That we would pick a side –  
to choose to follow you.

To choose the hard road;  
the narrow road;  
the less popular path,

knowing that this is the path to eternal life,  
with You  
in glory,

Amen.