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A0731 – August 5, 2007 – Jas 2:25 – Rahab Justified By Works

What we want to do is finish this section in James 2:14-26 and then tie it all in with what's come before in James 1:21ff because we're in the first of three main sections of the body of James' letter. If we don't understand the structure of the letter then we're not understanding what James is talking about. See, letters are structured by the author to communicate a level of meaning and so it is crucial to understand that structure. For example, what was the key verse in Revelation which gave us the structure? Rev 1:19, and that verse gave us the three-fold outline of the Book. That structure communicated an underlying level of meaning that we presupposed as we went in to details regarding the Church or the Tribulation or the New Heaven and New Earth. With that structure we were able to plug in the details and walk away with John's meaning. In James we want to do the same thing. We want to know the structure, the outline of the book and what you see so often is Christians using pre-texts as proof texts and this leads to so many errors of interpretation (e.g. James 2:19). If they were looking at the structure of James' letter in its cultural, historical and literary context then these misinterpretations could be avoided. And James has been mistreated in a variety of ways, probably more than any other NT letter, because of failure to see a clear plan or structure to his letter. So, a BIG part of understanding James is figuring out James' structure. Once we find that out we can put the individual texts within that structure. What we found was that James was following a rhetorical structure used by Greek rhetoricians of the 1st century. This is why it's so important to do historical and literary research. So, we found that Greek rhetoricians used a formula and James is following that formula. We have a Prologue, a short thematic statement near the end of the Prologue, the Body, and an Epilogue. James is following this rhetorical formula. He has a Prologue in 1:1-20, a thematic statement near the end of the Prologue in 1:19-20, the body in 1:21-5:6 and an Epilogue in 5:7-20 and

so, once we get this basic structure, what we want to narrow in on is the thematic statement because it outlines the body of the letter and the body is where James expounds the theme. So, what is the Book of James about? What does he want to communicate? Well, James tells us in the prologue that the context is trials and sufferings and how important it is to persevere through trials and then he comes to the thematic statement in verses 19-20 where he commands regenerate people to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. What he's basically telling us is, "Christians ought to respond differently to trials than non-Christians." But, when a person becomes a Christian he's got all these deeply embedded habit patterns. Sometimes years of practice in handling trials in the carnal way. And his point is, look guys, that's not going to cut it. Handling trials the carnal way will not produce the righteousness of God and God didn't call you out of this world to keep on living like the world. He wants us to grow spiritually, He wants us to mature. And this takes a transformation of mind and subsequent transformation of life. So, the three Christian responses in v 19 are not natural. They are what we are striving for in the Christian life. And it's much simpler to say "be quick to hear and be slow to anger" than it is to do it! I think we all know that. So, the body of the letter expounds how to cultivate these new response patterns. He's telling us how to produce these righteous responses. Now, it's tough because trials, sufferings and stress cause frustration and that can lead to resentment of God and eventually bitterness and a hard heart. But that won't lead to spiritual maturity, that kind of negative volition to doctrine will not result in spiritual growth. God gives us trials to test us and whatever the trial is, whether it be a big trial or a small one, the test is whether we'll apply doctrine or not. God wants us to apply doctrine consistently throughout the trial. This is God's prescribed means for spiritual growth. He regenerates us at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone, we learn doctrine, then He gives us trials and He says, in effect, are you going to apply the doctrine or not. And when we do we experience spiritual growth and we move toward spiritual maturity. So, James is about applying doctrine in the midst of trials as a means of spiritual advancement and victory in the Christian life. His key examples are people like Abraham, Rahab and Job, all saints who applied doctrine in the midst of trials to spiritually advance and have victory. Now, we might mention that the three trials Scripture records these three saints faced are the three defining trials of their spiritual lives. We all face little trials but it seems there's a defining trial, one that casts a giant shadow over

the others and that trial becomes the key step toward spiritual advancement. And what's interesting is, two of these saints are remembered in the Hall of Faith, You know, our culture has idols, athletes, celebrities, music stars. Take athletes, these guys that can do what people consider phenomenal things, throw no-hitters, make 50 points in a basketball game, hit over 756 homeruns and these guys eventually go down in some Sports Hall of Fame for all their records and yet, here we have the Hall of Faith and it just gets poo-pooed, a sad commentary on the shallowness of people. The world just doesn't have an appreciation for the real people out there, the guy who walks by faith, the Christian martyr in Sudan, the Christian who stand up to the big politicians, these are the people who should be in some Hall of Fame. And there's this one remark made about these OT saints down in Heb 11:38 that has brought me to tears. He says these are "men of whom the world was not worthy". Just think of the magnitude of that statement. The statement is so majestic I've thought about doing a class on it where we just go through these guys and the historic events in their lives and how they handled the pressures of life. So, here we are looking at Abraham and Rahab, people of whom the world was not worthy. And when the author of Hebrews names these two people he also mentions the trials where they were victorious. So, turn over to Heb 11:17-19.

Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested," What's the context of Abraham's test? Had he already believed God and been credited righteousness? You better believe it. That was mentioned more than 40 years before in Gen 15:6 and that perfect tense there looks back to Gen 12:1 when Abram was in Ur. He'd been justified before God for more than 50 years and here we have a test. Why does God test believers? To see if they will apply doctrine so they can grow spiritually. Well, this is Abram's big test. "when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*," Look around Abram, there are no other Isaac's. Imagine the gravity of the situation. The salvation of the entire human race is hinging on this guy Isaac and now his dad is going to kill him? Verse 18 "*it was he* to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." So, Abraham had this promise out there about Isaac, he had this doctrine, he had the word of God, the promise of God, and yet, then he gets this other word from God, "You go out there and kill your son Isaac." "Now, what's going on here God? Are you going back on your word? What do you have up your sleeve? If I kill him how are my descendants going to come from

him? He's got no children? God, I know you've got something going on here because you're a coherent thinker, you don't mis-speak." So, how did Abraham reason this thing through? Verse 19, "He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead," This is the doctrine. This is what Abraham was applying in the testing situation. It all comes down to whether we're going to apply doctrine and trust God or not. So, you can only imagine what Abraham and Isaac discussed on Mt Moriah, "Dad, where's the sacrifice?" "Don't worry lad, God's going to provide it." "But where is it?" Son, you're it. But I want you to think about what we know about God. We know He is a coherent speaker, we know He's promised that my descendants are going to come through you. But now He's told me to take you up here and sacrifice you. So, here's what's going to happen son. I'm going to kill you and then God is going to resurrect you from the dead and then you're going to go marry your wife and have my grandchildren." You follow the logic. There's nothing unreasonable about this at all. "So, climb up there on this altar so I can tie you down." And he goes through all this and goes over and picks up his knife to slit his throat. Now, that's how you apply doctrine. That's how you advance spiritually. That's how you get through a trial. That's how you meet what I consider the number 1 test, walking by faith in the midst of adversity. And this is why Abraham is in the Hall of Faith. And so, when we turn to James he brings up this event and he says, look opponent, your foolish to say doctrine can't be demonstrated in any visible way. Look at Abraham over here! Here's a guy who was justified back in Gen 12:1 whose got the doctrine of resurrection and look how he used it, look how he applied the doctrine of resurrection. Are you telling me, foolish man, that Abraham was going to kill his son without a doctrinal basis. You're crazy. Not Abraham, not the father of Israel. So, James insists that Abraham was justified by works at that time. James insists, just like Paul in Romans 4:2, that there are two justifications: justification by faith before God and justification by works before men. These are two different arenas of justification. One is in the heavenly court of God, the other is in the earthly court of man. This isn't one justification with two aspects. This isn't saying, we are justified by faith alone but the faith that saves is never alone, it is always accompanied by works. This isn't saying, "If a person really had faith then they would have works." There are two justifications in two different spheres, one before God which is by faith alone because, see, God can see whether a person has faith or not, and the other before man which is by works because, see, man can't see faith. So, verse 24 is so important to

translate correctly. Translators have really botched this one because they've got the adverb "alone" at the end of the verse modifying the noun "faith" and the way that's mistranslated it means justification is not by faith alone but also by works. So, it teaches one justification by faith and works, which, we might add contradicts Paul who says "to him who does not work but believes" (Rom 4:5). So, they play these semantic games to get around the contradiction but in the end it's still a contradiction. The answer is not to play some semantic game. The answer is to re-translate the verse so the adverb modifies the verb "justified". So, we translate it "You see that a man is justified by works and not only [justified] by faith," which, the plain sense of the words now means there are two justifications; one by works and the other by faith. So, now, when we get the grammar right there's no problem with the word of God. We don't have to slip into some semantic game. The word of God has been right all along if we'd just translate it correctly. And James insists in verse 22 this crowning act of Abraham was the fulfillment of Gen 15:6. Gen 15:6 is talking about when Abram was justified before God and the whole point of James is this: God has an intended goal for justifying us. There's a purpose and that purpose or goal is so that we will apply doctrine in the midst of adversity and be justified by good works before men. This accomplishes three things. First, it's our witness to the world. It trips an apologetic encounter, an opportunity to give a defense for the hope that is in us. Second, it's how we advance spiritually. Third, it vindicates that doctrine really works. And when I say doctrine works I mean it works every time without failure. God is truth and His word is truth and when we apply it it works. It never fails. This is absolute. Doctrine is more certain than gravity. You know there were times when gravity was not in effect in certain places in the universe. Where was gravity when Peter was walking on the water? So, statistically, doctrine works more often than gravity when we apply it. It's a 100%. Just look at Abraham. He knew the doctrine of resurrection and he applied it and what happened? It worked. You don't have to worry about it not working. It has always worked and it will always work because God never lies. Now, let's turn today to another example, this time a harlot, doctrine even works for harlots. You know, it's interesting, God, through James chooses Abraham and we think, well, Abraham's Abraham. He was a great moral guy. The guy is a pre-eminent figure in three of the world's major religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. So, this gets us thinking "Yeah, Abraham can do that but not me. I'm just little old me. Abraham was a good guy but I'm not. God's not going to throw in for me like he did for Abraham."

Now, to shut all that down God, through James, chooses a harlot. Really, that's an old Elizabethan word which needs updating. A better translation would be prostitute. Rahab was a prostitute. Now, it doesn't get much lower than that in terms of morality. In fact, she was the head prostitute, she owned the brothel. Actually, she was an innkeeper but in Canaanite culture innkeepers did a little more than just provide a place to stay. So, putting her and Abraham in the same context really bothers some people. But doctrine works for those branded prostitutes just like it works for branded as godly. And the rubber is about to hit the road in her life. Her city is about to be attacked. She's about to come under a severe test.

James 2:25 Ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους, καὶ ἐτέρα ὁδῷ ἐκβαλοῦσα; (BYZ)

James 2:25 And in the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, receiving the messengers and sending them out by another way? (Author's Translation)

James 2:25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (NASB95)

And in the same way indicates a comparison with Abraham. And it comes by way of a question. **was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?** The implied answer is "Yes, she was justified by works. So, again, we are talking about this second arena of justification that Paul opens the door for in Rom 4:2 and which James explicitly teaches in the corrected translation of James 2:24, "You see that a man is justified by works and not only justified by faith." This is a justification before men and is not the same as justification before God. They are two distinct and divisible justifications, two different arenas, one heaven and the other earth, one before God and the other before men. The second is the goal of the first. In other words, God justified Abraham and Rahab by faith alone and the intended goal or purpose of this justification was that they be justified by works before men. So, when a person justified before God applies Bible doctrine before men their justification before God is fulfilled, that is, it has met its purpose, its intended goal. So, justification before God is not an end in itself but a means to an end, the end being justification before men. In other words, God justifies us not by works but unto good works, which in turn justify us before men. But this

second justification happens only if we apply Bible doctrine in the midst of trials. So, now we want to understand the trial Rahab was in, so turn to Joshua 2 because James insists she was also justified by works in this situation.

Now, in this historical event the Israelites have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses has just died and Joshua is now Israel's leader and they are camping, according to verse 1 in a place called *Shittim*, a place meaning "the acacias" because there were many acacia trees there.ⁱ Well, this city is situated east of the Jordan River and they are preparing to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land and take the city of Jericho. Now, note verse 1, Joshua sends two spies secretly from *Shittim* saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." Why "especially Jericho? Because it was the key to the Promised Land. Jericho was the strongest fortress in all the Promised Land. So, in terms of military operations, Jericho was the key. If they could take Jericho then they could take the rest of the Promised Land. When we went in to Iraq where were the heaviest strikes? Baghdad. Why? Because Baghdad was the key. Now we're still struggling with Baghdad because of how the politicians are running the war. Well, Jericho was the key to the Promised Land and I'm sure Joshua was glad that God was designing the military operations because He was going to give them everything they need to get the job done. No lengthy deployment, a seven day war, totally decisive. And verse 1, the spies "went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and they lodged there." She was a harlot but she was also an innkeeper and so they lodged there. It says nothing more than that fact. Personally, I think they were there by divine providence. So, this Rahab was a harlot, she's been officially labeled a prostitute by the word of God. Great reputation! How would you like to be officially labeled a prostitute? Perhaps this is meant to demonstrate God's grace. It just highlights that no matter how immoral we are God still loves us and He sent His unique Son to die for all of us, including prostitutes. Well, the word of God and the grace of God had been at work in this woman's life. Drop down to verses 9-11, what does Rahab say? "I know (hear the certainty) that the LORD [she uses the name YHWH] has given you the land, [what's she saying, I know I'm in enemy territory, I know I'm camping on your real estate], and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt". How long ago was that? 40

years ago. The dividing of the Red Sea was front page news. People were still talking about it 40 years later. Continuing, “and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, [a giant of the Rephaim] whom you utterly destroyed. “When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer.” So, what had Rahab heard? She’d heard a portion of the word of God, that’s what she’d heard. And how does faith come? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom 10:14). So, these events triggered a response to God. And who is this God? She goes on middle of verse 11 “for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” What had she recognized about Israel’s God? That He moves the furniture around in history and guess what, Jericho’s the next piece of furniture on his agenda and it’s about to be trashed. So, she’s been cut deep to the heart about this God who’s turning the wheels of history. Sometime in the last 40 years she responded to this God positively. She responded with faith in the God of Israel, and when she did, at that point she was justified before God (arena 1). So, here she is in Jericho and the Israelites send these two spies and they go to her house. Is this just by chance or is this the providential hand of God? I think this was the providential hand of God. God was sending Rahab a test. See, Rahab was already a believer and now God’s testing her so she can advance spiritually. What are you going to do with My two Israelite spies? Are you going to turn them in? Are you going to hide them? When the jam comes Rahab, are you going to apply the doctrine you know or not? What doctrine does she know? Verse 9, that “the Lord has given you the land”. Notice in that verse that she doesn’t say “everybody knows, she doesn’t say “we know”, she says “I know”, “I know that the Lord has given you the land”. That’s the certainty of faith in the Lord. She’s already believed in YHWH. She’d already been justified by faith. Now YHWH has providentially guided these two spies to her house to test her. This is a providential testing of YHWH. These guys didn’t know what was going on any more than Rahab. Now, what’s she going to do? The Canaanite enemies are knocking on the door. Is she going to receive them? Is she going to apply the doctrine in her soul or not? So, she did. She received them, she applied Bible doctrine. She applied the doctrine she knew in a stressful situation. Now, I don’t know if you see the significance here of that decision. Rahab is a Canaanite. She’s been raised in a Canaanite culture. She conducts business with the local residents. She’s got friends here. She doesn’t know these two spies from Adam. But she has a personal relationship with the God of the universe. So, she’s only got two alternatives. Commit treason

against the king of Jericho or commit treason against the king of the universe. So, who does she side with? The God of the universe and what happened? It saved lives. Doctrine alone doesn't save but doctrine plus application does. That's James' whole point! See the magnanimity of this thing. Doctrine works all the time in every jam, even for harlots! Verse 2, now the spies at Rahab's house came to the attention of the "king of Jericho" and he sent word to Rahab, that is, he sent his soldiers there and demanded she send these guys out. You wonder why they didn't just barge in, but that wasn't the Canaanite way, they never entered a woman's house without permission. So, she tells them they were there but they left and if they took off they could catch them. But what she really did was hide the two spies away on her roof under the flax that was drying out. Now, there are some moral issues here that people struggle with since she lied. Suffice it to say here that in a military situation and I take this as a military situation there may be some special factors involved. After the soldiers left they worked out an agreement. Verse 12, "Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with [she's using the Hebrew word *chesed*, meaning covenant, enter a covenant with me and...] my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives [lit souls) from death." "deliver our lives from" what? "from death." What has James been talking about? He's been talking about saving the life from death. He's been saying "sin" leads to "death" (Jas 1:14-15) but doing works leads to "life" (Jas 1:21). Look, you've got two options in a jam, apply doctrine or sin. Sin brings death and application of doctrine brings life. So, here's Rahab in a life or death situation, quite literally. Verse 13, "So the men said to her, "Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you." Clearly it was her application of Bible doctrine that saved her life. If she had turned the spies away what would have happened to her? She would have been killed along with everyone else. So, here's a stressful situation where a believer is called upon to apply doctrine and live or not apply doctrine and die. As you can see, application of doctrine is a life or death issue just as James has taught us.

The story goes on in verse 14ff. They made an agreement that she would hang a scarlet cord from the window and this was the sign that the Israelites would not touch anyone inside that house. She lived in the wall on the inner

side and so, when the walls fell down the only section that didn't fall down was Rahab's house. So, she put the spies out the window and hung up the scarlet cord. A few days later the spies get back to Shittim, they move up to the Jordan, cross the river and start marching around the city. You know the story, once a day for six days and on the seventh day they march around the city seven times and blow the trumpets and the fortress walls of the city fall flat. Well, imagine, this woman is in the city this entire time watching the Israelites walk around each day and she's got her whole family cooped up her house. And the seventh day comes and this is the hand of YHWH, this is the hand of the God who dried up the Red Sea and utterly destroyed the two kings of the Amorites, this is the God who moves furniture. So, turn over to Joshua 6:16 and let's see what happens. Joshua says, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city. The city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to the LORD; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent." What's the emphasis here? Rahab and her house shall what? Live. Verse 21, "They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." This was holy war, total destruction of every living thing. Verse 25, "However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." What's the emphasis again, "she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day". Why? Because she applied Bible doctrine and hid the messengers. The events of Jericho and Rahab are a tremendous testimony of the saving power of applying Bible doctrine. If we were to put this in a sequence we would say, 1) Rahab heard about God saving the Israelites at the Red Sea, 2) she believed this God was the God of heaven and earth, 3) she was justified before God, 4) God sent her this trial, 5) she applied Bible doctrine, 6) she was justified before men and 7) she lived. If she had done otherwise what would have happened? She would have died. There is no doubt that James uses this physical example to parallel the spiritual reality in the Christian life. If we apply doctrine we will be saved from the deadly consequences of sin, if we fail to apply doctrine we are not saved but rather experience temporal death which is loss of fellowship in the least and physical death at most. God gives us trials to test us to see whether we will apply Bible doctrine or not and Rahab is a perfect example. The question we all have to face is, on a daily basis, in the small jams, the little frustrating things, when things don't go as you planned, when unexpected things happen

in your life as well as the big things, are we applying doctrine? Are we applying doctrine like Rahab the harlot? You know, we can criticize and criticize her for being a harlot but when it comes to applying Bible doctrine she shuts our mouths.

Her life among Israel was more than a meager one. She married a man named Salmon and they had a son named Boaz. And that Boaz married Ruth the Moabite and they had a son named Obed who had a son named Jesse who had a son named David, the king of Israel, and through him came Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (Matt 1:5) and King of kings. Can God use a harlot? You better believe it. She's in the line of Christ. We may have a terrible past but once we are justified before God He looks to each of us with a single eye. He does not reproach us for past failures (Js 1:5-6). He is a giving God who meets our needs when we apply Bible doctrine and He delivers us (Js 2:14). As a result of applying doctrine, Rahab the harlot entered the Hall of Faith.

Heb 11:31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

Are you willing to recognize this, oh foolish fellow?

ⁱ Acacia wood was used to make most of the furniture in the Tabernacle which was overlaid with gold.

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