

*Rahab's Salvation: Joshua 2*

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We come to a fascinating narrative this morning in our study of the book of Joshua. It has to do with a woman named Rahab—a prostitute.

Half of this chapter was read earlier in the service. I'm going to read the second half of the chapter now, beginning in verse 15.

There are so many fascinating details of this story. We're not going to explore all of them this morning. What I'm most interested in highlighting here is what I think God most wants to highlight in this story, which is God's merciful plan to save an immoral Gentile woman from the destruction that is coming upon her city. This is a story of salvation from judgment. It's a story of salvation by faith alone. And thus it is a story very similar to the story of every Christian.

Let's start by thinking about these spies, and then we'll consider God's purpose in all of this. And then we'll focus on Rahab—her risk and her rescue.

**Spies on a Mission**

Shittim was a place east of the Jordan River. The Israelites were very near the start of their conquest into the Promised Land. Within days they would be crossing the Jordan and heading toward Jericho, the first city they would take. Or I should say, the first city God would give to them.

And if you think about the way God gave this city to the Israelites—by having the Israelites march around the outside of the city, blow their trumpets and shout, and then the walls fell down—you realize that these spies had very little significance from a military standpoint. The success of their invasion did not rest on the success of these spies in scoping out the city.

In addition to this, they may not have been very good spies, because their whereabouts were discovered almost immediately. We read that already in verse 2, that word reached the king that these men of Israel had come to search out the land. And in verse 3 men from the king arrive at Rahab's place looking for these spies. Apparently they weren't the best at pulling off a successful reconnaissance mission.

It's interesting that Joshua sends spies at all. There is a precedent for it, though. Forty years earlier when the Israelites were at Kadesh Barnea, the Lord told Moses to send 12 spies into the land (Numbers 13). The result of that 40 day mission was very disappointing. Ten of the spies came back scared and gave a bad report to the people. Only 2—Joshua and Caleb—came back believing that the Lord would, indeed, give this land to them.

Now Joshua is in the leadership role, and he is sending the spies. He sends only 2, which is interesting. Surely he hoped, and probably had good reason to be confident, that these 2 spies would come back with a good report similar to the report he and Caleb brought back 40 years earlier. I imagine Joshua choose these 2 men very carefully. Men who had a deep faith in the Lord. Men who were strong and courageous.

And Joshua was not disappointed. At the end of this chapter we read that these 2 spies brought back a very good report, a very inspiring message, to Joshua. See verse 24

I believe that was one of the main functions of the spies' mission—to come back with an encouraging report. We're not told of any secret information they were able to gather that would have been helpful to the military strategy. And it doesn't appear that they had much time really to do any spying. They basically entered the city and then had to sneak out.

It was significant, though, for Joshua's sake and the sake of the people, that these spies could return to the camp and give testimony to the fact that the people of Jericho were afraid, and that it was clear the Lord was giving this land to the Israelites. What a great morale boost for Joshua and all the people.

But there was another purpose of the spies' mission that was even greater than this. And that leads to the next thing I want us to consider.

### **God on a Mission**

This story is so much bigger than a couple of spies and their feeble attempt to scope out the land. This story shows us God's mission to save sinners, to save those who seem the least worthy of being saved.

As it turns out here, the real purpose of the spies' mission, in God's plan, is Rahab's salvation. This is the story of God saving Rahab. It's clearly God saving Rahab. These spies are neither intending to save anyone nor are they capable of saving anyone—spiritually or even physically. It's a miracle they get

themselves out of there alive (and that's on account of Rahab saving *them*). But God has a purpose in all of this. It causes us to reflect on God's providence in all things, God's providence in these curious circumstances.

The story certainly raises many questions in our minds. Why did these spies go to the house of a prostitute? Was it because they were acting immorally? I don't think so. These 2 men, even if they weren't the best spies, were morally upright men who trusted the Lord. We don't have any reason to think they had immoral intentions.

So why would they go to the house of a prostitute? Well, it makes sense if you think about it. An establishment like this would be a place where men are coming and going and nobody is asking any questions. It would seem to be a safe place if you're trying to stay under the radar. It didn't work for very long for these guys, but the reasoning makes sense.

Thinking of God's providence in this, what are the chances of these spies stumbling into the house of a prostitute who turns out to be someone who fears and trusts the God of Israel? This is remarkable. This is providential.

And God continues to do things like this today. There are individuals in unreached people groups of the world whose hearts are becoming curious and eager to hear truth. And then God providentially brings believers into the lives of those individuals so they can hear the truth of Jesus Christ.

It could be that you are here this morning as someone who knows almost nothing about the Bible or the God of the Bible. If that's so, we are very glad you're here. And we would love to tell you more.

For many of us, who are already believers, we should be thinking about how God may want to use us as messengers of His salvation (and to folks we might think are the least likely to have any interest in God). The "mission" may take different forms. It could be a business trip, or a volunteer position in the community, or a family gathering. And it could be that, in God's providence, He has you there to rescue someone from judgment. God has you in that conversation in order to represent Him and reveal His truth and communicate His promise to rescue those who trust in Him.

God had a plan to save Rahab. These 2 spies didn't have a clue about what was going to happen. But God had a plan. We may not have a clue of how God wants to use us. But surely He

has a plan for us to spread His truth and grace and thus to rescue sinners.

As we think about God's plan in saving Rahab, we can trace this back in time and forward in time from these events.

#### The Lord's Promise to Abraham – Genesis 12

Going back in time, we recall the Lord's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that the Lord would bless all the families of the earth in Abraham. Well, the rescue of Rahab is a part of that. We are seeing here in Joshua 2 a fulfillment of that promise to Abraham. Here's a Gentile, an Amorite, not a descendant of Abraham, who is being incorporated into the people of God by faith.

#### Jesus' Genealogy – Matthew 1

And then going forward in time, we find out that Rahab turns out to be in the genealogy of Jesus Christ! Her name appears in the genealogy of Matthew 1. After being rescued from the destruction of Jericho and becoming part of the people of God, Rahab married a man named Salmon and they had a son named Boaz who later married Ruth. And they had a son named Obed, who had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David—King David. And then the genealogy goes on from there all the way to Jesus. These are God's mysterious and wonderful plans. God is on a mission to save sinners. He draws people to Himself and also pieces them into His plans to glorify His Name and save yet more sinners.

#### The Woman of Samaria – John 4

There's an interesting story in John 4 that has some similarities to the story of Rahab. God didn't have to save Rahab, of course. She deserved judgment just like the rest of Jericho deserved God's judgment. Her sins were especially apparent. But God went out of His way to extend grace to this woman.

Similarly, in John 4, we read of Jesus going out of His way through Samaria and having a very significant encounter with a woman at a well. This woman, like Rahab, was sexually immoral. She had had 5 husbands and was presently living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus chose to reveal Himself to this woman of Samaria. It was unconventional. It was unexpected. And it was a beautiful display of Jesus' mission to save sinners.

## Rahab's Risk

Let's think further now about Rahab and the risk she took in order to identify with the Israelites and their God. The first thing we read about Rahab in this chapter, other than the fact that she's a prostitute, is how she put her life on the line to save these 2 Israelite spies.

Verses 3-7

The point of this passage is not to teach an ethics lesson on whether it's OK to lie in a situation like this. That's an interesting discussion to have, but it's not the point of the text. This is an historical narrative, and it doesn't comment on the morality of Rahab deceiving these messengers from the king. In fact, neither does the passage comment on the morality of her being a prostitute. Just because Rahab is commended for her faith, we can't conclude that being a prostitute is ok or that lying is ok in certain circumstances. Those are questions that have to be answered in other ways.

I just want us to see this passage for what it is. It's certainly not setting up Rahab as exemplary in every respect. But the point here is that Rahab has sided with the Israelites. She has separated herself from her own people at risk of her life, at risk of her family's safety, because she believes in the one true God of Israel.

Just think about if this interaction went differently. If the king's messengers showed up at Rahab's place and asked for her to turn over the spies, and if she did just that . . . if she said, "Oh, yeah, you mean these two guys who are hiding out on my roof? Sure, here they are." If that's what happened, we might conclude that Rahab is truthful and submissive to authority, maybe overly so, unnecessarily so. And we would also conclude that she is either cowardly or certainly NOT on the side of the Israelites.

As it is, whatever we conclude about the morality of her specific actions here, what is unmistakable is that she is courageously siding with the Israelites.

And this is one of the key lessons we should take from this story. Here is a very imperfect person, as we are all imperfect in many ways. It's clearly not her upright moral life that earns her a place among God's people. It is, rather, her faith that connects her to the people of God. She believes in the power of this great God, and therefore she's willing to take a great risk to identify with this

God. Her faith allows her to see that it would actually be a greater risk NOT to side with the God of Israel.

Verses 8-11

We're not told how Rahab heard these things about Israel. But surely as people passed in and out of Jericho there was talk of the things happening in the broader region. And people must have been talking a lot about this group of people who had come out of Egypt 40 years ago in a striking and miraculous way. Much more recently this group has defeated the Amorite kings Sihon and Og. And now, here they are, ready to invade Jericho.

Rahab shares plainly with the spies that the people of Jericho are scared. They fear the power of Israel's God. But Rahab fears Yahweh in a special way. She does not fear Him in a way that makes her run and hide from Him. Rather, she fears Him in a way that makes her run to Him, run to His people, and to align herself with Yahweh, even at risk of her life.

In this way Rahab's life highlights God's grace in a spectacular way. She believes in His great power, and she acts on that belief.

Her faith is highlighted in the New Testament in the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11.

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

And James 2 also highlights Rahab as an example of active, lively faith as opposed to empty, dead faith which is no faith at all.

The second half of James chapter 2 is making a crucial point that true faith is active faith. If you really believe, then there will necessarily be activity that flows from that faith.

*“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”* (James 2:14–17, ESV)

What we see in the life of Rahab is a faith that IS accompanied by works. She feared the God of Israel. She was being drawn to Him. She believed in Him. And how can we see

that? How do we know that her words, her profession of faith, saying to the spies that “the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” . . . how do we know that went deeper than words? How do we know she really believed that? Because she risked her life to save these spies. She risked her life to side with Israel.

If you’re familiar with that passage in James 2, you know that James gives us two examples of active faith. I think it’s a beautiful thing that James gives us these two examples. Two examples that are so drastically different in many ways. Abraham and Rahab. A patriarch and a prostitute. The famous father of Israel, and an obscure immoral Gentile.

I think the implication here is that God can save anyone. If you’ve made a mess of your life and you don’t think there’s any hope for you, then consider Rahab. Consider the prostitute whom God graciously and miraculously saved. He can do that for you. No matter how sinful and wicked your life has been up to this point, God can change you. Come to Him. Trust in Him. Repent of your sins, and put your faith in Jesus Christ. And like Rahab, you will be saved. And, like Rahab, your faith will become evident in risk-taking acts of obedience.

### **Rahab’s Rescue**

In verses 12-21 of Joshua 2 we read of the conversation between Rahab and the spies as they make promises to one another—Rahab promising to stay quiet, and the spies promising that she will be spared when Israel takes the city.

We’re told that Rahab’s house was part of the wall. She helped the spies sneak out through her window (climbing down a rope) and instructed them to head toward the hills which would have been to the west of the city. The men from Jericho who headed out in pursuit of the spies went to the east toward the Jordan River, which is where the spies originally had come from. But then after 3 days those men returned to Jericho. And then the Israelite spies were able to travel safely back to their camp on the east side of the Jordan.

It’s in chapter 6 that we read of how God defeated Jericho for the Israelites, and in the midst of that we read about Rahab’s rescue.

6:17 Joshua’s instructions

6:22-25

Rahab followed the instructions given to her by the spies. She gathered all her extended family into her house. She didn't betray the Israelite spies by telling anyone in Jericho their whereabouts. And she put the scarlet cord out her window to make it clear where she was.

That's another piece of this story that makes for an interesting discussion, but is not the main point of the story – the scarlet cord. It's possible that there is some significance to the color of this cord. Scarlet, the color of blood. And therefore it's possible that it hearkens back to the Passover when the Israelites were to put blood on their doorposts. It's therefore also possible that it somehow foreshadows the blood of Christ. I'm not inclined to read too much into this. It's possible that there's some theological significance to it. It's also possible that this was simply the color that would stand out clearly against the city wall so that the Israelites could easily identify it from a distance.

Either way, the point is that Rahab's faith in the Lord continued to produce the fruit of obedience. The spies had promised her deliverance, and she was acting in accord with that promise. She was believing that promise, acting on that promise.

Imagine Rahab and her family gathered in that house, which was built into the wall. Imagine them peeking out the window as the Israelites marched around and around the city. Rahab and her family knew that the God of Israel was capable of destroying Jericho. It may have seemed silly that Israel's army was just marching around the city. But Rahab believed in the power of their God, who was now her God as well.

She also believed another thing. She believed in the power of God to save. She knew that destruction was coming. She also believed that she and her family would be spared the coming destruction. So they waited in that house for those seven days, with the scarlet cord hanging out the window. They waited for their deliverance from destruction.

In many ways, Rahab's situation during that time parallels the Christian life in this world. We have been promised deliverance, and we are awaiting that future deliverance from destruction.

Romans 5:8-9 is interesting to think about in light of Rahab's story.

*“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by*



*his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” (Romans 5:8–9, ESV)*

In the verses that surround this we’re described as weak, ungodly, sinners, and enemies. Verse 6, “while we were still *weak*.” And then in the second half of that verse, “Christ died for *the ungodly*.” And in verse 8, “while we were still *sinners*, Christ died for us.” And finally, in verse 10, “while we were *enemies*.”

This is the great love of God for us, the great sacrifice of Christ for us. This was not a rescue mission to save people who deserved to be saved. This was not a heroic mission to protect good and righteous people. It was a love that reached across the battle lines and made the ultimate sacrifice for ungodly sinners who were opposed to God.

John Stott says it well, “The more the gift costs the giver, and the less the recipient deserves it, the greater the love is seen to be.”<sup>1</sup> This is a love that cost the giver everything. It cost the Father His Son. It cost the Son His life. And in terms of the recipients, we did not deserve this. We deserved the opposite of this. As enemies of God, we deserve to be destroyed. But Christ died for His enemies.

In verse 9 Paul starts with something amazing that has happened to us in the past, and then he uses that as assurance of something wonderful that will happen to us in the future.

Verse 9 refers to justification, which has been such a focus in the chapters leading up to this. In 5:1 Paul summarized what he had just been teaching by saying, “since we have been justified by faith.” That is, counted righteous in God’s sight because of our union with Christ. Now in verse 9 he writes, “Since, therefore, we now have been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” The reference to God’s wrath is a reference to the Day of Judgment. The judgment is the bad news, that those who remain unrepentant will fall under the fierce wrath of God on the last day.

But here we’re getting the Good News that those who have been justified by the blood of Jesus will be saved by Jesus from God’s wrath.

To really be in awe of the Gospel we have to acknowledge both the wrath of God and the grace of God. We have to realize how angry God is at sin. He was angry at Jericho for their sinful lives. He is angry at us for our rebellious and selfish lives. But

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<sup>1</sup> Romans, page 144.

Christ died to absorb that wrath for us. And when a person repents of sin (turns away from those sinful patterns of life) and rests in what Christ has done to rescue us, that person is united to Christ and because of being identified with Christ has a right standing before Almighty God. There is no longer enmity between us and God. We've been reconciled. And that's why we don't have to fear the coming judgment.

Judgment is going to come. The ungodly will be punished. But those who are in Christ Jesus need not fear, because we will be spared.

So let's marvel this morning at this story of Rahab the prostitute. Her story is our story in so many ways. We fear the God who has the power to destroy, the God who also has the power to save. We've received a pledge of His commitment to us, and we await His coming when we will be rescued from the destruction we deserve. Instead of being destroyed, we will be included among His people and will dwell with Him forever.