

Message #5

Joshua 2:1-24

Alan Redpath, a British Bible Teacher, Pastor and Evangelist (1907-1989), who pastored Moody church in Chicago from 1955-1962, once told the story of seeing a WWI warship come to port in England. The ship had been in battle. It had holes in its deck; no mast, no funnel. The bridge was blown out and the deck was in shambles. Water was pouring in and out. The ship was a beat up mess. But on board were 25 sailors and an officer standing at attention. He said as that ship pulled into port, every throat that could cheer did and every other ship in the harbor blew their horn to honor this ship and these sailors. They were heroes.

There is no doubt that in heaven there will be many who will be honored who had lives that at one time had been a mess. But they made a decision to turn to the Lord and they became heroes. That is the story of Joshua 2. **Joshua 2 is the story of a sinful harlot who becomes a saved, sanctified hero.**

Joshua 2 is one of the great chapters in the Bible. It is the story of a prostitute, a street walker, a hooker, a whore being used by God in a very dramatic way. **When the story opens this woman is running a house of prostitution; but when the story ends she is leading a house to salvation. This woman ends up being one of the heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:31) and she ends up in the kingly lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5).** What a story this is and what a woman this turns out to be. The lesson to see is this:

WHEN GOD IS LEADING HIS PEOPLE TO VICTORY, HE WILL SOVEREIGNLY SAVE THOSE YOU WOULD NEVER EXPECT AND USE THOSE YOU WOULD NEVER EXPECT TO HELP HIS PEOPLE ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL.

If you and I would have written this script, the last person we would pick to be used so greatly by God would have been Rahab. She was a woman with a terrible track record. She was immoral and she made her living by selling immorality. She was the kind of woman that most “decent” people would not even talk to and yet this was the woman God would choose to use.

It would be like God choosing to use Hugh Hefner to help us accomplish His will in this church. That is how bizarre this is. We would never think this would ever happen.

I am convinced that when we are doing God’s work in obedience to His Word, He will bring some remarkable and unusual people into our lives to help us accomplish His will. They may not be the type of person we would think God would ever use. Some godless individual may be used by God to give you a job or fix your car or help you do God’s will. This is the story of Joshua 2.

There are seven spy-related realities brought out in this chapter:

REALITY #1 – The spies are sent by Joshua into the Promised Land. **2:1a**

Joshua is a military man. He has good military savvy and he wanted Jericho scouted. He is not a Biblical scholar like Moses; but he has a job to do and he is going to tackle this the best way he knows how. He decided to use spies and there are four facts to observe:

Fact #1 - Joshua sent two men as spies. **2:1a**

Now Joshua had once been one of twelve spies that Moses sent into the land. We may recall that only Joshua and Caleb were faithful. This may have been one reason why Joshua only sent two spies.

Fact #2 - Joshua sent the two spies secretly. **2:1b**

Joshua did not want everyone and their brother knowing about this. He did not want any leaks or possible problems. He did not want any negative or disheartening reports that could undermine this work so he secretly sent these men.

Fact #3 - Joshua sent the two spies from Shittim. **2:1c**

Shittim was located about seven miles east of the flooded Jordan (Josh. 3:15). These men had to cross this river, either by fording or by swimming. There was no special miracle that got them across this river.

Fact #4 - Joshua sent the two spies especially to Jericho. **2:1d**

Jericho was the first major city the Israelites would face. Joshua wanted to know about its fortifications, its military forces, its morale and its mindset.

Jericho was located about five miles west of the Jordan. So traveling from Shittim, these spies would need to go about 12 miles to Jericho, which was a key citadel of the Jordan River Valley. What we do see from this is that God demands that we do our homework in preparation.

Now at this point, Joshua has no idea as to how God is going to get them across the river and he does not know how God will give him Jericho. All Joshua knows is that he has a job to do which is to take the land and he assumes his responsibility to get the job done by sending spies into the land on a reconnaissance mission. Canaan was a land of city/states and to conquer it, each city/state had to be taken one by one and Jericho would be the first hurdle.

There is a very important lesson to learn here and that is **God's sovereign will and purpose for our lives does not eliminate our responsibility to do our homework and our preparation.** Joshua is going about this as if the whole weight and responsibility were on his shoulders.

REALITY #2 – The spies are housed by the harlot Rahab. **2:1b**

Rahab was a known harlot who ran a house of prostitution. She sold sex for money. From the days of Josephus, some historians have tried to downplay this idea by making Rahab the keeper of the house; however, New Testament Scriptures use Greek words that imply Rahab was a prostitute (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). In fact, the Hebrew word “lodged” (sakab) can refer to sexual activity.

The spies went to Rahab’s house and we are not told exactly why. Perhaps they felt this would be a good cover and they could learn a great deal from a prostitute about what was happening in Jericho. A prostitute entertained all kinds of men and she would be in the type of setting where she could overhear all kinds of city rumors.

Now we may be certain that Pharisees would not have them hide here. They would probably rather had them hide in some religious temple; but God’s plan included these guys hiding in the home of a prostitute.

REALITY #3 – The spies are discovered at Rahab’s house. **2:2-3**

Someone got wind of the fact that these Jewish spies were at Rahab’s parlor and they told the king of the city, who immediately sent word to Rahab to send out the spies. When you are doing the will of God, there will be threatening opposition. But what we will also discover is that we will have the protection of God.

What is absolutely amazing is the fact that the king of Jericho knows that spies have come to spy out the land. Now the spies certainly did not tell anyone what they were there for (**2:14**) and we know Joshua had kept everything a secret, so what we must wonder is how in the world did this king find this out? According to **verse 2**, someone told the king that they were there to spy out the land. Perhaps some men had been at the Rahab Ranch and guessed the Jews were there for that reason and they told the king. What we do learn is that somehow Satan surfaced this and the king found out about it. Satan has his spies everywhere and he will always try to stop the will of God.

REALITY #4 – The spies are protected by Rahab. **2:4-7**

Rahab decided to protect these spies and there were two ways she did this:

Protective Way #1 - She protected them by hiding them. **2:4, 6**

Rahab had taken the men on top of her house and put stalks of flax over them and hid them. Stalks of flax were pulled up at harvest time and taken to roof-tops for drying. They were first soaked in water for three to four weeks to separate the fibers and then taken to the roof to dry in the sun. The flax then could be made into linen. Stalks were usually about 3 feet long.

These spies were hidden by a prostitute under stalks that are used to make her trade more enticing. A good high class house of prostitution featured nice linen.

Now I want us to observe that these spies are hiding, they are not walking out in the open. God is protecting these men, but they are doing their part to prevent themselves from being discovered. God expects us to use our brain and do our part. If you see a tornado coming, God can protect you, but He expects you to get into the basement.

Protective Way #2 - She protected them by lying for them. **2:4-7**

A successful prostitute is a good liar. She knows how to lie to protect herself and her clientele. Heidi Fleiss, who ran a prostitution ring, got into serious trouble for lying to the IRS. So prostitutes know how to lie.

Now the king sent some men to Rahab in order to get the spies and Rahab told four lies to protect them:

(Lie #1) - She said she did not know they were from Israel. **2:4b/9** - she did know

(Lie #2) - She said she saw the men leave the city. **2:5a** - they didn't leave

(Lie #3) - She said she did not know where the men went. **2:5b** - they were up on her roof

(Lie #4) - She said she knew they could overtake them if they hurry and go after them. **2:5c**

They could not overtake them because they were not where she said they were.

The two spies are up on top of her roof and she knows who they are and why they are there and she is lying for them. This matter of her lying has really stirred up controversy with God's people:

- 1) Some believe she should not have lied but told them they were up on her roof and trusted that God would protect them.
- 2) Some believe she should have submitted to the king's authority and told the truth.
- 3) Some believe she is not a believer and she is simply doing what a Canaanite prostitute did—lie.
- 4) Some believe lying is legitimate in times of war when up against a godless enemy.
- 5) Some believe situation ethics demand certain actions in certain situations.
- 6) Some believe she is a believer and is doing what God would have her do.

Now we know that God is a God of truth and God is a God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2). We know that God hates lying; it is an abomination to Him (Prov. 6:17, 19). We also know that Satan is the father of lies and that those who lie are satanic (John 8:44).

However, we also know from James 2:25 that this act of Rahab is that which is approved by God. In II Chronicles 18:19-22 God specifically authorizes that lies be told to Ahab so he would be killed. This is one of those rare times when what Rahab did was right.

REALITY #5 – The spies are addressed by Rahab. **2:8-13**

Notice I said the spies are addressed by Rahab, not undressed. There are those who have speculated that these spies committed immorality with her. The word “lodged” (**v. 2**) may in fact be used of sexual activity. However, there is nothing anywhere that indicates this. In this discussion we learn a lot about Rahab and Jericho. The spies got what they were looking for; they got the information they needed:

There are three facts Rahab reveals to the spies:

Fact #1 - The Canaanite knew that the land had been given by God to Israel. **2:9a**

There were no misconceptions about this fact. These people knew this land was Israel’s land. They were not about to willingly give them the land, but they knew it belonged to Israel. I am convinced that many Arabs realize this today. They know it is Israel’s land.

Fact #2 - The Canaanites feared Israel because they knew God destroyed Israel’s enemies. **2:9b-11**

Those Canaanites had heard about the Red Sea and the Egyptians. They had heard about what happened to Sihon and Og who were two powerful Amorite kings that the people respected that God had totally destroyed (Numbers 21:21-35).

This is like today. Most people know what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah because of their promotion of homosexuality, but they are not about to change.

Fact #3 - The Canaanites knew that favorable treatment of Israel meant they could be spared and blessed. **2:12-13**

These people realized God is the God of Israel and if we treat Israel right, we may live and not die. Rahab had heard God was for Israel and since she had helped Israel, she knew that God potentially could help her.

Look who God used to protect His spies and His nation—a prostitute.

REALITY #6 – The spies leave the house of Rahab. **2:14-22**

The spies repelled out of the window of Rahab down the wall and left Jericho. Rahab knew the tactics of the Canaanite men so she told them that they should go to the hill country and hide there for three days (**v. 16**).

These spies were listening to the counsel of a prostitute who is being used by God to minister to their needs.

The men said (v. 17) that they would spare her if she was not to tell anyone and also that she should dangle a scarlet thread out her window, which was the same rope she had let them down with (2:18).

Early church fathers said this was a symbol of being covered by the blood of Christ. “When I see the blood I will pass over you.” I want you to observe something here that I think is theologically significant. Not one time do these spies suggest that her salvation demands she stop being a prostitute; what they tell her is dangle that scarlet thread out your window. That is what will save you and your family. Our job is to invite people to come to Christ, not give up their sin. If they come to Christ, He will clean them up.

It is possible that most of her family was ashamed of her, but she was going to be used by God to save them all. According to **verse 22**, the spies did what Rahab said; they went to the hill country and hid for three days. Just about a half mile west of Jericho is a series of limestone cliffs that are approximately 1500 feet high. These cliffs have all kinds of caves in them and they are a great hideout spot. This is where the spies hid.

Now before we move on, I want to make an important prophetic observation. During the Tribulation many godless people will be used to help hide Israelites from the evil world dictator king, the antichrist. These non-Jewish people will be raised up by God to protect those Jews who truly believe Jesus will return to give her the land. On a worldwide scale there will be many Rahab-types who will be saved.

REALITY #7 – The spies returned to Joshua. 2:23-24

When the two spies went back and reported to Joshua, he does not rebuke them for staying with a prostitute. They had learned a great deal and **verse 24** points out they were very positive. They learned that the people were afraid of the Israelites and that they knew this was Israel’s land God had given to them. This sets the stage for great victory.

Practical Lessons:

- 1. When you are doing God’s will, God may use some very unusual people to help you.**
- 2. No matter how bizarre one’s past, one may be greatly used by God if one will believe in the One who wore the scarlet robe (Matt. 27:28).**
- 3. People blessed by God promote the welfare of Israel and realize God has given her a specific land.**
- 4. When we reach out to those who have a seedy past, we may see God do some remarkable things.**