

The Faith of Rahab
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
October 9, 2022

Text: Hebrews 11:31

Purpose: We need to realize that when we place our faith in God, it doesn't matter where we have been or what we have done. We are accepted when we repent and place our trust in God.

A minister was walking down the street when he came upon a group of about a dozen boys, all of them between 10 and 12 years of age.



The group surrounded a dog. Concerned lest the boys were going to hurt the dog, he went over and asked "What are you doing with that dog?"

One of the boys replied, "This dog is just an old neighborhood stray. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home. So we've decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie will get to keep the dog."

Of course, the minister was taken aback. "You boys shouldn't be having a contest telling lies!" he exclaimed. He then launched into a ten minute sermon against lying, beginning, "Don't you boys know it's a sin to lie," and ending with, "Why, when I was your age, I never told a lie."

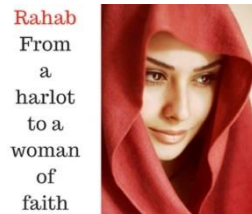
There was dead silence for about a minute. Just as the reverend was beginning to think he'd gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, "All right, give him the dog." ¹

Today, we want to look at the faith of Rahab who actually began her step of faith with a lie. Last week we examined the faith of Joshua who led the people of Israel to adopt an absurd military tactic of marching around a city for seven days, only blowing a trumpet, and then on the seventh day, march around seven times. What was even more amazing was that when the people of Israel shouted, the entire city of Jericho fell flat.



Faith Inside Jericho ²

While Joshua led the people of Israel to obey God by faith, there was one person on the inside of Jericho that had faith in God as well. That person was Rahab. Hebrews 11:31 says, *“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.”*



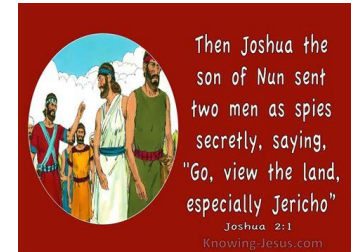
Obedience

To help us understand the background of the story we need to go back to Joshua, chapter two and hear the story that brought a city prostitute into a key relationship with the people of God. Her actions and faith enabled her to save herself and her family.

The Faith of Rahab

Let us examine the faith of Rahab. If you will remember, God allowed a faithless generation to die in the wilderness. Moses had sent in spies into the land 40 years earlier, but they refused to believe God would save them. It was time for the people of Israel to take God at his word, and step forward in faith. Just before they crossed the Jordan River, Joshua sent out two spies to view the land.

Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country.” So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country.” (Joshua 2:1-3)



Joshua sent two men into a country that knew they were next on the hit list. The inhabitants of Jericho were situated in an open valley, in a walled city. The people that lived there were Amorites and Canaanites – and they were afraid. They were on “a high red alert status.”

I am sure the two men dressed in ordinary clothes in attempts to blend into the crowd. One of the commentaries said they probably forged the Jordan River upstream and worked their way into the city by way of the caves that were in the North. Apparently, they were able to slip into the gate of the city, but someone saw them and followed them to Rahab’s house.



News got back to the king and Rahab had to give an account of these men’s whereabouts. A few of the Bible translations say that Rahab was an innkeeper providing housing for merchant travelers. If she was running an inn, then this would be a good place to go to unnoticed.

It would appear they had been found out and the Israelite spies' fate was sealed. They could not retreat back into the city. If they jumped from the window, they would have easily been caught in the open valley. Instead, their way of escape was in the hands of a prostitute. God's two spies were saved by a woman Madame, a proprietress of a bordello, a woman who sold her body for money. The word used in the New Testament (James 2:25, Hebrews 11:31) that describes Rahab was *pornee*, (A word we use for pornography.)

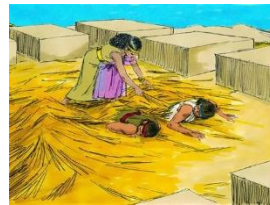


Her selfless act of protecting these two spies was so unexpected and extraordinary. I guess that is why she is listed in Hebrews alongside Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Joshua. Hebrews 11:31 says, *“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.”*

I find it is most significant to find the last person mentioned by name in this list in the Hebrew Hall of Fame, a Canaanite woman, who was a prostitute. I believe God has intentionally placed Rahab here in this list to let every ordinary person, who is a sinner, know they are welcomed into the family of God if they confess faith in Him.

Faith's Work

When we turn to the rest of the story in Joshua, chapter two, we find Rahab's faith actually was accomplished through a lie!



Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, (to the guards searching for the spies) “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.” (But she had brought them up to the roof

and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.) Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate. (Joshua 2:4-7)

When Rahab testified to the King's officials about the whereabouts of these two spies, she actually told three lies. She said she didn't know where they had come from, she said they were gone, and she didn't know where they were. Rahab's first work of faith was actually a lie!

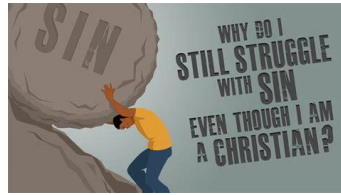
Does that mean it is okay to lie in certain situations? All of us here have been caught in a situation where a lie will make it easy for us. The scripture gives us several examples of people that lied. Abraham lied about his wife being his sister. (It was a half lie! Because she was his half sister.) But the scripture is clear that it never approves of deception. God's word uniformly calls us to truthfulness and condemns falsehood.

Jesus Christ, who is our model, is a supreme example of one that always told the truth. As members of the Body of Christ, we are obligated to do our best to live by Christ's example.

When Rahab lied about the two spies and hid them in the thatch roof of her house, you need to realize she was putting her and her family into a great deal of danger. If she were caught, all of them would have been executed for treason.

Maybe we should not be so hard on Rahab for lying. After all, probably in her pagan culture background, it was probably acceptable to do that. She knew she was joining her and her family with the people of God, but she may have still had some leftover habits and sins from her past.

This is a powerful lesson that mature Christians need to understand as well. When we bring someone to Christ that has been involved in a lifestyle of sin, they may still be struggling with many of the sin issues from their former life.



John Newton, the man who wrote the song, “Amazing Grace,” continued to work in the buying and selling of slaves a year after his conversion to Christ. I have talked with ministers that have problems with their newest Christian converts. They may still be living with someone. They may still be working their way off drugs. They may still have a taste for the sinful life. But over time, a true Christian will recognize the areas of their life that are not matching up with God’s will and will take positive steps to change it.

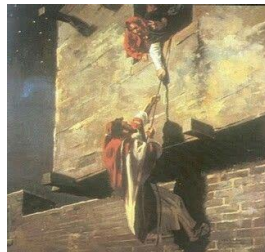
R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on Hebrews tells of a story of a long-time missionary friend that when he was first converted he was a hard core drinker. He had to fortify himself with six martinis to get the courage to share Christ for the first time! I believe Rahab would have understood this completely.

Often real faith is mixed with sin. God finds faith where we do not and cannot see it. We need to be slow to judge sin and quick to perceive faith.

The Bargain of Safety

When Rahab hid the spies, she bargained safety for her and her family. Here is what was discussed in Joshua chapter two.

Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have,



and deliver our lives from death.” So the men answered her, “Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you.” Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. And she said to them, “Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way.”

So the men said to her: “We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the



window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father’s household to your own home. So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear.” Then she said, “According to your words, so be it.” And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window. (Joshua 2:12-21)

Did you see what the sign would be to identify the family of Rahab? A scarlet rope hanging out of the window.

Rahab demonstrated complete trust in God. If God did not come and judge the city of Jericho, then eventually Rahab’s collaboration with the two spies would have been found out eventually.



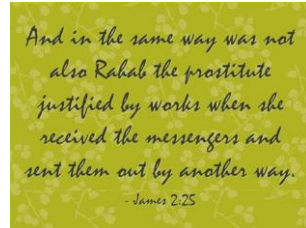
I am sure she sat in her house along the city wall and watched as the Israelite army walked around the city. Every time they made their way around, I am sure they could see that red scarlet rope as a signal of promised protection and identification when the army attacked.

There is a scarlet red cord running throughout the bible. At Passover, the blood was put upon the door posts to protect the family from the angel of death that was coming to kill all the firstborn of both man and beast. This red chord was hanging out of the window of Rahab to send the two spies to safety. When Christ died on a cross years later, his blood was shed for all that call upon the name of the Lord.



Rahab stood against her whole culture and trusted in Israel's God. She trusted in what was yet unseen.

James chapter two tells us of the tension between faith and works. True faith will produce good works. Abraham's faith in God was so strong that he was willing to sacrifice his only son in obedience to God. James 2:5 says, *"In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?"*



James is letting us know that our faith must be grounded in obedient acts and in faithfully surrendering our will to God's will. It is not simply an intellectual decision. Genuine faith is costly. Rahab risked everything in order to obtain the promise of God and a place in His Israelite family.

Faith's Formation

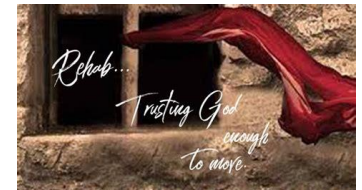
Where did Rahab obtain such overwhelming faith?

I am sure that her home had been the place where traveling merchants had stopped off before they headed in another direction. I am equally sure she had learned of the news of Israel and how they had conquered their enemies. We read of her testimony in Joshua chapter two.

Now before they (the two spies) lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. (Joshua 2:8-11)



News had spread to her about how God had delivered them time and time again. All of this contributed to her willingness to abandon her connection with Jericho and realign herself with Israel.



Rahab's example of faith helps us understand that only God knows where true faith will rise from. We would have never guessed that a Canaanite prostitute would demonstrate such faith that she would be listed along Abraham and Moses. When Jesus came to His people and they received Him not, Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did."* (Matt. 21:31, 32)

There is no one too bad or too ignorant to be saved. You may be a drug user or a drug dealer. You may have lived a sinful life like Rahab – serving as a prostitute. Anyone can be saved if they only turn to God and repent of their sin. Rahab gives hope to the hopeless, no matter the circumstance!

Faith's Reward

There was a reward for Rahab for her demonstration of faith. **First Israel was encouraged.**



So, the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us." (Joshua 2:23-24)

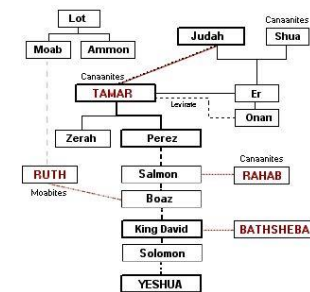
Joshua realized God had already prepared the people of Jericho for destruction. They were quaking with fear. They were uplifted by the spies' report. That was quite a different reaction to the spies' report from 40 years earlier.

A second reward was her and her families' salvation. This initially came as physical salvation.

And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel. But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. (Joshua 6:23-25)

Rahab probably did not have complete faith when she joined Israel. But over time, she believed and became a full member of God's covenant people.

A third reward for Rahab was her glorification. What I mean by that is that she actually lived the fairy tale dream you only hear about in children's books. If you read the genealogy of Jesus as it is recorded in Matthew, chapter one, you will find Rahab ends up in the family tree of Jesus. Rahab is King David's great grandmother!



Nashon, who was Rahab's father-in-law, was one of the twelve princes from the tribe of Judah that made a special offering at the tabernacle. (Numbers 7:12) Rahab married Salom who was the son of Nashon. So the truth is that she did marry the princes son! If you follow the story a little further, you will notice that Salmon and Rahab had a son named Boaz. He was the man that eventually married Ruth the Moabite.

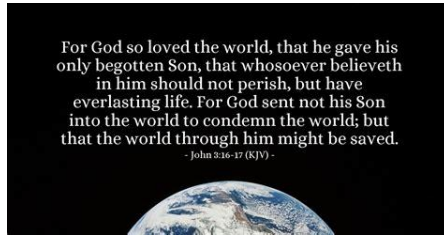
For some individuals you may be disturbed in learning there was a prostitute in the family tree of Jesus. This fits perfectly because all of humanity are born as sinners in need of salvation. We don't need to look down our noses at Rahab because all of us are in need of salvation. We all stand before a holy God in need of His grace and forgiveness.

Conclusion

Faith comes to us as we respond to God's word. As we hear God's word come to us, we are challenged to respond. We have a tremendous advantage over Rahab. We have God's total word for us to read and learn from. We need to hear the message of salvation – not judgment.



For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-19)



Not only do we have God’s Word to lean upon, we also have each other as we journey through life. There are people that will pray for us, counsel us, and even give us their resources to help as we have need.

If we could only grasp that God does not expect us to be perfect. He knows our weaknesses and is ready to help us with them and forgive us when we fail. He only expects us to respond to Him in faith – simply trusting. God will take you just as you are. We do not need to wait until we are fully cleaned up before God accepts us. Christ died for us “*while we were yet sinners.*”

God is looking for us to hang our scarlet rope out our window and simply trust Him alone for our salvation.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mikey’s Funnies, July 18, 2008 – A Lie Funny

² Outline from R. Kent Hughes Commentary on Hebrews p. 135-145