



The Faith of Rahab

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 11:31; Joshua 2:1-21

November 20, 2016

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An Unlikely Example You know beloved, the writer of Hebrews has done an amazing job in this 11th chapter, combing through Israel's history and singling out examples of men of faith, men who can be imitated, men who staked their lives on the One True God. He has given to us examples from the lives of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and then last week, Joshua and the 2nd generation of Israelites. He has given us these flesh and blood examples of authentic faith, of living and active trust in God in order to inspire faith in us – faith that trusts in the right sacrifice for sins, faith that worships God in the right way, faith that speaks and testifies to God's worth, faith that pleases God, faith that obeys God, faith that acts, faith that trusts God's Word implicitly, faith that looks to the future reward without getting discouraged, faith that chooses the hard and costly right over the easy wrong, faith that beholds the power of God and believes in His character, and faith that wins the victory.

The writer has given us really great examples, right? -- Hebrew men of old, renowned for their faith in the Almighty God. And this morning, as we look at **this** text, the writer of Hebrews singles out one more person, one more witness and it is the most unlikely person that we could imagine. It is not a Hebrew man of character chosen from Hebrew lore. He chooses a Canaanite woman -- a prostitute -- and holds her forth as a picture of active, living faith, in the Lord God. Think about this now. The last person that the writer of Hebrews chooses to single out as an example of vibrant faith is a female Canaanite prostitute. And he knows what he is doing, because although she is the most unlikely choice, she is possibly the most compelling of them all. We are going to look, this morning, at the story of Rahab the harlot as it is recorded for us in Joshua chapter 2 but before we do that, let me just make a couple of comments regarding common questions that come up whenever this story is studied.

Two Common Questions Whenever you study the conquest of Canaan in general, one of the questions that comes up is, “Was it ethical of God to command Israel to destroy and remove the Canaanites from their homes and take possession of the Promised Land?” That’s a good question. In order to answer that question we need to know something of the character of the Canaanite people. The Canaanites were not basically good people or innocent victims. They were a wicked, defiled, sexually immoral, violent, murderous, degraded, and idolatrous people. The whole of the nation was corrupt and when God gave to Moses the specific commands regarding the morality that was to define the nation of Israel, He spoke of these people saying: **“Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.”** (Leviticus 18:24–28, ESV)

God gave the people of Canaan 400 years to fill up the measure of their sins. They knew, as we will see in this story, the certainty of God’s coming judgment, but they continued to be, in the words of the writer of Hebrews, “disobedient.” The Canaanites, as far as God was concerned, had forfeited the right to the land and had earned for themselves divine judgment. The conquest of Canaan was the judgment of God and Israel was the instrument that God would use to judge a universally and defiantly wicked and corrupt people. This is hard to think about and from a human perspective hard to fathom, right? But if we see the world through the eyes of God’s holiness, if we will submit our judgment to the Word of God, we can see Canaan the way that God saw it –as corrupt, as opposed to everything that is good and of God, and as worthy of judgment. The story of the conquest of Canaan is at the same time a story both of God’s faithfulness to His people who have been made His people by grace alone, through faith alone, and also the story of God’s righteous judgment against the wicked.

The other question that is raised, and you know this if you are familiar with this story at all, is whether or not it was right for Rahab to lie to the king of Jericho and to hide the Israelite spies that showed up in her inn. In fact, there is probably no incident in biblical history that has had more ink spilled on more pages throughout history as Rahab’s lie. Let me just say a few things about that. First, nowhere in Scripture is Rahab commended for telling a lie. She is commended for receiving the spies and for her faith, but never for her lie. Second, God

never commends lying. He is the God of Truth and he commands us repeatedly throughout the Scriptures to speak the truth. God demands that we be people of integrity. Third, this is a very complex issue that requires a great deal of maturity and wisdom to discuss. For instance, some people hold that there is a different ethic that exists in war and peace. Spies, for instance, are spies through deceit and by careful disguise of both their nationality and their intentions. Maybe John Calvin said it best when he said, **“As to the falsehood, we must admit that though it was done for a good purpose, it was not free from fault. For those who hold what is called a dutiful lie to be altogether excusable, do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God. Therefore, although our purpose, be to assist our brethren, to consult for their safety and relieve them, it never can be lawful to lie, because that cannot be right which is contrary to the nature of God. And God is truth. And still the act of Rahab is not devoid of the praise of virtue, although it was not spotlessly pure. For it often happens that while the saints study to hold the right path, they deviate into circuitous courses... On the whole, it was the will of God that the spies should be delivered, but he did not approve of saving their life by falsehood.”** Fourth, the danger in simply declaring Rahab’s lie to be acceptable in this situation without painstaking discussion and reflection is that we will be tempted to excuse lying and falsehood under far different circumstances, with far greater ease, and according to what seems best to us. Last, the main emphasis in the story is not on the lie itself, but on Rahab’s faith and determination to throw her lot in with the people of God and not Canaan. To focus on the lie is to miss the point of the passage and the point of the passage is the faith of Rahab, a faith found in the most unlikely place. It’s like finding a Frankie Rowland’s rib-eye steak in your MacDonald’s sack. So let’s look at this story in Joshua 2 and then we will pull out some lessons from Rahab’s faith.

Faith in an Unlikely Place (Joshua 2:1-21) Let’s look at this story together starting in Joshua 2. **“And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.””** (Joshua 2:1-3, ESV) Now, obviously, we are backtracking a little bit. This story takes place before the walls of Jericho came tumbling down like we talked about last week, before Joshua came face to face with the Commander of the army of the Lord, even before Israel had passed over the Jordan River, to when Israel was encamped on the far side of the Jordan at Shittim. Like Moses before him, Joshua sent two spies on a reconnaissance mission to see both the land and to especially check out Jericho.

That was a dicey maneuver for a couple of reasons. Jericho was a walled city in an open valley so it would have been tough to sneak up on them. Not only that, they were on alert, the massed presence of the Israel on the far side of the Jordan making them suspicious and wary of everyone. Most likely the spies would have taken a circuitous route to get to Jericho, maybe trying to go north, cross the Jordan and loop around the city and come into it from the West – whatever – they came to the city and when they got to the house of Rahab, a house that was situated on the outside wall.

Why would they go to the house of prostitute? Well, you need to know that Rahab's house would have been more like an inn or a boarding house where travelers could sleep, eat, and if they wanted to, to take advantage of the other services that were offered. No one, they thought, would notice them there and they could get easily engage the other travelers in conversation and get practical intelligence on the city and its gates. That would have been their thinking, but obviously there was something far bigger at play behind the scenes – the sovereign God drawing Rahab to faith in Him, bringing her to faith in the Lord God. God was at work behind the scenes.

But as quickly as it started, the whole spying enterprise fell apart. Someone saw them enter the city and was suspicious and trailed them to Rahab's house. Agents of the king came looking for them and Rahab somehow found that out. They were stuck. They couldn't go back into the city, they couldn't escape out the window. It looked like they were going to die... except for one totally unexpected thing – the faith and good works of a Canaanite prostitute.

“But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.” (Joshua 2:4–7, ESV) Rather than turn the spies over to the king to be executed, she risks her life to save them. She throws her lot in with these men whom she has just met. As the

writer of Hebrews puts it, **“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)

Why did she do these things? Because of her faith in God.

Look at it, starting in verse 8, **“Before the men 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, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt 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, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.”** (Joshua 2:8–11, ESV) What an amazing confession of faith from this woman. She confesses her knowledge of God’s display of power and judgment at the Red Sea, the way that Israel, empowered by God had dispatched the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and devastated their cities, the fear that gripped them all and that led her to faith, a faith that she acts upon. Look at this now. **“Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”** And the men said to her, **“Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.”**” (Joshua 2:12–14, ESV) All of this takes place before the king’s men get there. She makes this incredible confession. She boldly requests protection, deliverance for she and her family.

And then, after sending the king’s men on a wild goose chase, she comes back to these men to help them escape. **“Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. And she said to them, “Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.”** The men said to her, **“We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father’s household. Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall**

be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.” And she said, “According to your words, so be it.” Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.” (Joshua 2:15–21, ESV) Rahab the prostitute sends them away and then, to identify her house among all the others as a house of faith, she ties a scarlet cord in her window. Wow! What an incredible scene, a scene that is filled with faith. What do we see here?

What is To Be Commended in Rahab’s Faith? Let’s think about it. What do we see here to commend?

First, Rahab’s faith is to be commended for its certainty. Listen again to the testimony that she gave to the spies before she hid them on her roof. She said, ***“I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt 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, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.”***

Rahab made one of the most unequivocal and clear confessions in all of Scripture – not only in Yahweh as the God of the Hebrews, but in Him as the only God of heaven and earth. She didn’t merely confess that God was a god among many, even the greatest among the gods. Her faith went much further. She boldly confesses to the spies that she believes that Yahweh is the One True God, the one Who created all things, who is present with His people. She knows God has given Israel the land of Canaan. She admits that Jericho has lived in fear of the day when the people of God would come and take possession of what was rightfully theirs by promise. God had granted her an eye to see and an ear to hear. She knew better than to suppose that a nation of slaves, by their own strength, could have destroyed the nation of Egypt and escaped its clutches, or lived for forty years in the wilderness, or annihilated the forces of kings like Sihon and Og. In fact, one of the great ironies in this story is that she actually had faith, a greater faith, a real faith from only hearing about the works of God than the Exodus generation who had seen God’s power with their own eyes!

One writer says, “For one who had been a polytheist all of her life, worshiping gods of the heavens and gods of the earth, and who had plied a sinful trade, showed a remarkable grasp of truth concerning the Lord. We are not told what the spies told her by way of filling in the

gaps, but it is obvious that Rahab believed the message of the "gospel," this good news of the only One who could deliver her from impending judgment."

Her faith made her respond rightly to the grace she had been given. He saw the arrival of the Israelite spies as a gift from God, as a grace from God, and she laid hold of it. She did not miss the day of the Lord's visitation. She did not treat the visitation of His grace as cheap. She did not receive the grace of God in vain. As Paul writes in 2 Cor. 6:2, **"For he says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (2 Corinthians 6:2, ESV) Rahab didn't miss it.

Rahab's faith gave her a new allegiance and made her distinct from the other Canaanites.

Think about this. When Rahab made the choice to protect these spies, to protect the people of God and to throw her lot in with them and with God, she became, in effect, a traitor to the rest of Jericho. She did the most disloyal thing imaginable. Do you see that? For Rahab to be saved, she had to make a distinct break with her people, with her culture, with her old profession, with her entire life. She had to change her allegiance entirely. Of course that was not easy and she had to have wrestled with the implications of the cost of faith, but she did it. Jesus said, **"'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.'**" (Matthew 13:45-46, ESV) There was nothing in Rahab's life, her old life, that was not worth trading to have God and the His Kingdom.

She acted on her faith and, think about it, when she hung that scarlet cord in her window, and gathered her family into her house, awaiting the coming judgment of God and the deliverance that she believed she would receive from God, it forever identified her as a believer in the Covenant God and an ally of His people. If Israel failed, if God did not act, she and her family would have been forever exposed as traitors to Jericho and, no doubt, she would have met a terrible end. Her faith changed her allegiance and made her distinct from the rest of Jericho.

Rahab's faith made her act in boldness. Rahab's faith did not make her idle, instead she was bold in her requests of the Israelite spies. **"Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that,**

as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." Faith is bold and it makes bold requests. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, **"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."** (Ephesians 3:20–21, **ESV**) Clearly Rahab had some sense of that truth. Her faith led her to make a bold request and for that reason...

Rahab's faith led to her own salvation and the salvation of her family. Think about the confession that Rahab had made concerning God. She knew God was right to judge her city. She did not complain against God or question his justice. She knew that she and her city deserved the judgment of God for their evil ways. And although the whole city trembled with fear regarding the impending attack, although they saw Israel march around the city for days on end, though they had heard of all that God had done for His people – their fear did not lead to repentance and faith, to begging God for mercy. They wrongly believed that their walled city could protect them. Only Rahab responded. Rahab's fear led her to turn from her sin and to believe in God, to cast all of her hope upon the mercy of God. Although she did not understand a great deal of theology, she had enough faith in the One True God to save her.

But listen, it wasn't enough for her that she would be delivered from the wrath to come, she wanted the same thing for her family. It is a miserable faith that does not desire the same salvation, the same rescue for our family and friends. She knew her family would likewise perish except they find refuge in God. She was determined that she would see her family preserved as well, rescued from the impending judgment and she did all that she could to ensure that they would also be saved.

Rahab's faith made her endure in patient hope. It made her to be patient and wait for the revelation of the power and judgment of God. Rahab sent the spies away, gathered her family to herself, and hung the scarlet cord in the window. And think about that scarlet cord for a moment. The Hebrews who knew well the story of the Passover and the blood of a sacrifice that was spread on the doorposts and lintel so that the Destroyer would pass them by when he visited judgment on Egypt – what a picture that would have been to them. An emblem of atonement, red like the blood of the sacrifice, an emblem to us of the blood of

Christ under which all who abide are saved. That scarlet rope was a picture of the covering of God over the household of Rahab.

And under that covering, Rahab abided, patient and hopeful, enduring the days until her salvation would be fully accomplished. And her patient faith was rewarded. Days passed, maybe up to a month, before the first circling of Jericho took place and then the Israelites marched away! But still she believed. She was surrounded by unbelieving Canaanites and still she stood strong. Day-by-day she watched the silent marching, her heart beating with anticipation of deliverance, her faith sustaining her until finally the day came. The invisible army of the Lord of Hosts crumbled the walls of Jericho. It all collapsed except for one section of the wall, one home – Rahab’s. Her patient hope and endurance were rewarded with rescue. It’s an illustration of the promise we have already read in Hebrews: **“For, *“Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”*** (Hebrews 10:37–39, ESV)

Rahab’s faith changed her life from futility to fruitfulness. Where was Rahab’s life leading before she experienced this grace of God, before she responded to God in faith? She was treading the path of futility that leads to eternal destruction, right? But her trust, her faith in the Covenant God changed all of that. I want you to know something – this is just mind-blowing. After Rahab was delivered, after she left her old life of sin behind, she was married, but not to just anybody. She was married a prince in the tribe of Judah named Salmon and they had a son named Boaz, who married a woman named Ruth. Their son, Obed, was the father of Jesse, the father of King David, from whose line was born – you guessed it – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Rahab, the former prostitute, became an ancestor of Jesus Christ. How is that for grace!?

Rahab’s faith testifies to that faith has real fruit. Everything that she did in this account from Joshua and Hebrew speaks to the fruit of real faith. James writes, **“*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?*”** (James 2:24–25, ESV) What she believed was demonstrated, expressed and exhibited in her life. Her works demonstrated her faith, and the same is true of us. We confess that Christ is our Savior and Lord, right? What do we do that we would not do if we

didn't believe that? What effect does our faith have on our actions? We believe in the judgment to come. From what sin does that restrain us? What difference does our faith make in our conduct? How does our faith make us bear up and persevere under trial and hardship? What difference does it make on our values as opposed to the rest of the world? What difference does our faith make? For Rahab, her faith changed everything.

Rahab's faith stands forever as a testimony to the power of God to save even the most unlikely from a human perspective. How incredible this whole story really is. The Israelites had come to Canaan to take possession of the land that God had promised to them and they sent out spies to examine the land, but behind all of the reasons for the spies to go to Jericho, was the providence and the will of the God to save Rahab. Rahab was perhaps the most unlikely choice for salvation -- after all she was immersed in the very sexual immorality that was such a large reason why God's judgment was coming upon Jericho and all of Canaan -- and yet God had chosen to give her grace. The very fact that the writer of Hebrews calls her "Rahab the prostitute" is not to continue to identify her old life, but to underscore God's abundant and amazing grace to sinners.

She is an example, a perfect example, of what God has done throughout history, calling all kinds of people to Himself, delighting to show His grace. These are the people that make up the church of Jesus Christ. Salvation is not for the good people; it is for sinners who need a Savior. The church is made up of unworthy people whom God has found and saved through faith in blood of Jesus Christ, in His personal sacrifice to win forgiveness for sinners, in His blood offered up for the forgiveness of sins and the his death to extinguish the wrath of God. In Christ, there is forgiveness for every unworthy soul who will repent and believe.

In Rahab we see the truth of Paul's words in 1 Cor. 6, perfectly illustrated. ***"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*** (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, ESV)

Beloved, I trust that you can see why I said at the beginning that although Rahab may seem to be the most unlikely person for the writer of Hebrews to place in this hall of faith, she is in many ways the most compelling and the one to whom we can most closely relate. As Gentile sinners, we have the most in common with Rahab.

May we have the same kind of faith. A faith that: **is to be commended for its certainty; that gives a new allegiance and makes us distinct; a faith that makes us bold; a faith that leads to our own salvation and the salvation of our family and friends; a faith that makes us endure in patient hope; a faith that change our lives from futility to fruitfulness; a faith that shows itself in its fruit; and a faith that testifies to the power of God to save even the most unlikely.**

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