

A Study of the Book of Joshua

Sermon # 2

“Outliving Our Past”

Joshua 2:1-21

Many people, even Christian's struggle all of their lives trying to overcome their past. Since they have never forgiven themselves they have a hard time believing the God has truly forgiven them. Perhaps some of you live daily with the constant ache of regret. The thoughts of your previous mistakes and sins still haunt you. You live with the continuing thought, *“If only...if only I'd done this or had not done this... Life would be different.”* Tonight we are going to study the life of a woman who epitomizes the idea of trying to “Outlive our Past.” The woman's name is Rahab and it will become very obvious that Rahab has made some bad choices in her life. She was a prostitute. But when it comes to God, the choices of the past are not near as important as the choices that you make now.

Chapter two of Joshua begins with, “Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from to spy secretly, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.”

The text does not say but some have surmised that Joshua was in error by sending out the spies. They say that he should have simply trusted in God and moved ahead. But the fact that God had instructed Moses to send out the twelve spies earlier (Numbers 13:1-2) it is reasonable to conclude that God had likewise instructed Joshua to do the same now.

If the spies had been sent in obedience to the command of God, as we have reason to believe, we also have reason to believe that God had a great purpose than just bringing back information. I believe that situation is similar to that in John 4:4 where it says that Jesus “needed to go through Samaria.”

It was not that Jesus had to go through Samaria, but that Jesus had a purpose in going through Samaria, the salvation of a Samaritan woman. In the same way, I believe the two spies were sent to Jericho at a certain prostitute could be saved.

God had been at work in Rahab's heart, leading her to faith, and now he was sending his messengers to confirm her faith and to physically save her.

In the chapter that we have before us we have a shining example of God's sovereign grace. Here is a clear testimony that his saving purpose extends beyond the narrow confines of any one nation or anyone group of people. God's grace is so broad that even the most unlikely of people can objects of it.

Verse one continues, “....So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.” She is identified as a prostitute and it was undoubtedly for this reason that the spies went to her home. No I am not saying the spies had an immoral purpose. But where else, could two strangers go where they were least likely to be asked embarrassing questions.

There are a number of things that I want us to consider in relation to Rahab's faith.

1. FAITH CAN BE BORN IN THE MOST UNPROMISING OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

On the human level, the possibility that any one in Jericho would come to believe in the true God was very rare indeed. The first thing that would have been against her was her religious background. She lived in a pagan city in the middle of a pagan culture.

She did not have the privilege of having any detailed information about the only True and Living God.

But if her religious background made her a unpromising candidate, then she was even more so because of her moral background. Rahab was not a religious pagan she was a prostitute.

In this most unlikely of places, this pagan and dark city, in this most unlikely of people, true faith was found.

2. FAITH IS BASED ON HEARING AND ACTING UPON THE TRUTH (VV. 9-11)

To understand why Rahab did what she did we need to fast forward to verse nine. Rahab here reveals her faith, "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. (10) 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. (11) 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.

Rahab had heard something of the reports of the mighty works of the God of Israel."

Because of her profession Rahab was uniquely situated to have been well informed of events outside of the city of Jericho. She had heard reports of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army some 40 years earlier. She would have heard news of the more recent conquest by Israel of the two Amorite kings. For most of the citizens of Jericho such news had terrified them, but fright is not faith. She had heard and had concluded what other equally fearful people had missed – that if Israel had enjoyed such miraculous victories, then their god must be the true God.

Rahab had become convinced in her mind and in her heart that Israel's God was the true God. Paul tells us that "faith comes by hearing" (Romans 10:17). Rahab perhaps did not have much knowledge but what she heard she considered, believed and acted upon. Rahab is twice held up as a model of faith in the New Testament. First, she appears in the list of heroes and heroines of faith in Hebrews 11:31 where it is said,

“By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.” Then the book of James (2:25) says, “... was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?”

This should remind us that no one is beyond the reach of God’s saving power. If God could save someone like Rahab, in spite of her religious ignorance and in spite of baggage of her immoral past, if he could save someone like Rahab, he can save anyone. Isaiah 59:1 says, “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.” Rahab reminds us that nothing is impossible with God. Rahab stands with other wonderful trophies of grace that are saved from all kinds of immorality and sin.

The fact that Rahab believed in spite of all her disadvantages and barriers surely is a challenge to those who have heard and in spite of this privilege have never come to faith.

3. FAITH DEMANDS DECISION (vv. 2-8)

“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.” (3) 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.”

When the king orders you to bring out the spies it is not really a request. Rahab really had only two options, having lately come to faith in the God of Israel, she could confess her belief and side with the Israelites or she could abandon her belief and hand over the spies to the authorities.

Rahab had learned about God and was determined to follow him, whatever that decision might cost, even if it meant standing alone. It is always easier to stand, if someone is standing with you. It is easier to believe if other around you also believe. But it is altogether different to believe something if you are alone, when no one thinks as you do. People such as Rahab have to be commended for having the courage to stand as solitary champions of a righteous cause when surrounded by people who do not share their faith.

She repudiated her past for the sake of her new faith in the God of Israel. She was not a Jew but since she believed in the Jewish God she instinctively knew that here place was now with the people of God. In fact she believed more genuinely than some Jews did, and thus she was more Jewish spiritually speaking than many of those born Jews.

Verse four says, “Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. (5) 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.” (6) (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.) (7) 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. (8) Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,”

Rahab not only hid the spies but she misdirected the king’s men. Rahab’s life would not have been worth a wooden shekel if her deception had been discovered. Rahab had to know the risk she was

taking, yet she risked everything on the basis of her new found faith. Her faith in God was so real and so strong that she was prepared to put her own life at risk in order to do what she knew was right.

A person's life will either demonstrate the reality or the lack of reality of their profession of faith. Where a life consistently contradicts the profession no matter how often or how strongly it is stated, the faith that they say they have is not saving faith. The Bible says that true faith always has a transforming effect on the life of the individual.

With the search party of the king on their way toward the Jordan River, to look for the Israelite spies, Rahab went up to the roof of her house to speak with the spies. She says in verse twelve, "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,

She was entirely honest with what she wanted from the spies, the protection of her family, verse thirteen, "and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."

4. FAITH DEMANDS DEMONSTRATION vv. 14-21

"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." (15) Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. (16) 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." (17) So the men said to her: "We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, (18) 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. (19) 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. (20) And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear." (21) 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."

Rahab had agreed to the constraints of the spies as they had agreed to hers. She must keep a red cord hanging out of her window on the city wall. And she must have her father, her mother, her sisters, her brothers and all their families in her house when the conquest takes place.

It must have been a severe test of her faith to convince her family of the need to come to her house and then to remain there. We don't know how long they had to wait until the conquest of Jericho began. Then can you imagine the mounting pressure each day for seven days as the Israelites marched around the walls of the city. Each day after the Israelites have circled the entire city in complete silence, the troops turned around and went back to camp. But on the seventh day the walls came, down. I believe, that literally, but with one exception the section of wall, with the house of Rahab with a scarlet cord hanging from the window.

5. FAITH IS ALWAYS REWARDED

In Joshua 6:25 we find that Rahab and her all family were saved just as had been promised. Not only did she enjoy deliverance from death for herself and her family. She was fully included in the community of God's people. The scripture says, "and she lives among the Israelites to this day." Even beyond that she later married and had children. If you trace the lineage of Jesus, Rahab is listed as a direct ancestor of the Lord. What a marvelous victory over her past and what a reminder of the wonder of God's grace.

Let me close with this illustration taken from Max Lucado's book, "No Wonder They Call Him the Savior."

Christina lives in a small dusty village in Brazil. Her heart was empty and she felt like society had cheated her of its joys. She longed for the excitement of the big city of Rio. One morning her mother Maria awoke to find Christina's bed empty.

"Maria knew immediately where her daughter had gone. She also she knew immediately what she must do to find her. She quickly threw some clothes in a bag, gathered up all her money and ran out of the house.

On the way to the bus stop she entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black and white photos, she boarded the bus to Rio de Janeiro.

Maria knew that Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that before were unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria, began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place she left her picture – taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each she wrote a note.

It wasn't too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village.

It was a few weeks later that the young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet the little village was, in too many ways, too far away.

As she reached the bottom of the stairs her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation. 'Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home!' She did"

[Max Lucado. No Wonder They Call Him Savior. (Portland: Multnomah, 1986.) pp. 158-159]