

Joshua 2

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to the passage that we read, Joshua chapter 2. And I'd like to think this morning for a little while about Rahab. Rahab is not only mentioned here and in other passages in the Old Testament, but also she's mentioned very honorably in the New Testament in a couple of places, in the letter to the Hebrews and also in the letter of James.

Now the situation, the historical situation in which we meet Rahab consisted of something like this, that the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt and they'd been a long time in the wilderness and the desert, 40 years in fact, but now they were on the very brink of entering into the promised land.

And it's called the promised land, of course, because God had promised that land to Abraham, to his family. And it had been a long time before the children of Israel were able to benefit from that promise and to actually enter into the land.

But now they were on the very brink of doing so. They were still on the east bank of the River Jordan, sort of looking over into the main part of the promised land, but they had not yet entered. And of course we know that Joshua, in that situation, being a very wise commander, decided to send spies into the land of Canaan to see what the country was like, to see what the lie of the land was like, as they say, and to see how well fortified the cities were, particularly the city of Jericho, which was the first major city just across on the other side of the River Jordan, and the first one that they would have to capture if they were going to have any chance at all of taking over the land of Canaan.

[1 : 58] Now we get rather a surprise when we hear that these two men sent out on this very important and very dangerous mission. When they arrived in Jericho, they went to the house of a prostitute.

Now, many people have tried to explain away what was meant by this word being referred to Rahab. But in fact, there really isn't any point in explaining it away.

The Bible calls a spade a spade. The Bible just tells us bluntly what the facts are. It doesn't seek to explain away. It doesn't seek to cover over the various faults and sins of people who even later on perhaps became very important.

Nor does it even cover over the sins of very important men of God, people like David and so on. All these people, it tells us exactly what they were like.

And it tells us here what Rahab was like before she met any of the people of Israel and before she really came to know the great blessings that were connected with Israel.

[3 : 07] We know, in fact, that prostitution was something very common in the ancient world. And we know particularly the land of Canaan was rife with this as with every other kind of vice imaginable.

We might wonder why it was then that the spies went there. Why did they go to the house of a prostitute? Well, it's perhaps made clear by the word that's used of Rahab here that she was not one of the group of people that were known as sacred prostitutes.

That is, they would be connected with some fertility cult at some of the temples of the gods that they worshipped in those days. But she was what we may call a private prostitute. In other words, her house would have been somewhere in the back streets, as was obvious, because her house was on the city wall.

That is, right away from the main thoroughfares of the town. And therefore, it would be a very isolated place. It would also be the kind of place where people would tend not to ask too many questions.

And perhaps it was for some of these reasons that the two spies went to the house of this prostitute called Rahab. I'd like, first of all, to think about Rahab's condition when we meet her, first of all, here.

[4 : 22] She belonged to the Canaanites. She belonged to the people that were living in the land of Canaan before the Israelites came. And we're told that that people were under the judgment of God.

Now, that judgment of God had been a long time coming. We're not to think that suddenly God decided, oh, I want to get the people of Israel into this land of Canaan, so I've got to get these other people out.

And suddenly, he sort of invents a judgment for them. It is not like that at all. God's judgment is most solemn and most serious. And also, it is normally very slow in coming.

In other words, God gives every opportunity for people to turn from their sin. We see this particularly with the Canaanites, or as they're also called in the book of Genesis, the Amorites.

We see in Genesis chapter 15, where God is actually talking to Abraham. He's made his covenant with Abraham. And in verse 16 of that chapter, God says, Now, these are very important words there.

[5 : 47] God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham's family. Abraham's self was not to see it. He didn't own any part of that land apart from the plot of ground that he bought to bury his wife Sarah in.

But his family were going to have it. But they were not going to have it yet. And the reason why they were not to have it yet was because the sin of the Amorites, the sin of the people who lived in that land, was not yet complete.

In other words, things had not yet reached the stage where God, who is the God of complete justice, could bring judgment upon that people by removing them completely from the land, bringing a terrible and an awful judgment upon them.

Now, this reminds us and shows us that God, in all his dealings with mankind, is absolutely fair. In every case of God's dealing in judgment, the judgment, the punishment, fits the crime.

No doubt, the people living in that land at the time Abraham was there, they were sinners just like everybody else. But yet they were not as bad as they could possibly be. That time had not yet come.

[6 : 59] But yet, later on, some hundreds of years later, that time had arrived. And that is emphasized for us in Deuteronomy chapter 9, where we're thinking here about the actual time has come when the people of Israel are to enter the promised land.

Deuteronomy chapter 9, verses 4 and 5. After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.

No, it is on account of the wickedness of those nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. Emphasize that God was not bringing the people of Israel into the promised land because the people of Israel were very good or very special.

Rather, it was because the evil of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, that was the reason why he was driving them out. Not because the Israelites in themselves were any better than they were.

And that time had now arrived, when God's judgment was going to fall upon this land. Now, the Bible gives us some idea of some of the horror, of the sinfulness and cruelty of the people at that time, but also archaeological discoveries back up the same kind of thing.

[8 : 27] It was a society that was riddled by all kinds of vice. It was a society in which vice was very much tied into the religion of the land.

It was the kind of society where, as I mentioned already, prostitution was connected with the religion and worship of the land. There was also child sacrifice.

The whole idea that the gods could be appeased by the sacrificing of children to these gods, sacrificing them in fire. And there's evidence that this was used as a terrible and horrible threat over the people, a way by which those in religious or political power dominated people with fear, the fact that they could demand this great sacrifice of them.

Now, Rahab was a part of this society. She was very much a part of it because, by her very lifestyle, she was part and parcel of the vicious and depraved society in which she lived.

Also, there's evidence in even the very way in which she deals in this chapter that very easily deceit and falsehood came to her lips without thinking about it at all.

[9 : 43] Now, we know that, of course, this was used by God in delivering the spies, but yet, nevertheless, we cannot excuse the sinfulness in itself. It evidences that this was part and parcel of the whole lifestyle that she was part of.

She belonged to a fallen, a corrupt, and a condemned race, a race for which time was running out, a race that was very much under the judgment of God.

Now, isn't that exactly the picture that is portrayed in Scripture of the whole human race, not just the Canaanites?

The Canaanites were, perhaps we might say, one extreme, one obvious example. But the whole testimony of Scripture is that the whole human race is under the hand of God's judgment.

For the whole human race, time is running out. And every one of us, by nature, we are part and parcel of this fallen, sinful human race. In our first father, Adam, we sinned and fell.

[10 : 48] Our great representative sinned and failed and turned away from God and rebelled. Therefore, ever since that time, we have been under God's curse and under God's judgment.

And even in spite of that, we have added to that sinfulness our own sinfulness, our own rebellion. We then, by nature, are part and parcel of this race that is under God's just condemnation.

In the New Testament, this is emphasized just as much as in the Old. In Romans chapters 1 and 2, it is made very clear that every person and every part of the human race is under God's judgment and God's fair and righteous judgment.

The beginning of that passage in Romans chapter 1, verse 18, Paul begins by saying, The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

And he goes on to list some of that ungodliness and unrighteousness that was evident in his own day in the Gentile world, in the whole Greco-Roman world, around the whole area of the Mediterranean, and also among the Jewish people themselves.

[12 : 03] Coming to the final conclusion, quoting again from the Old Testament, that there is none righteous, no, not one. So then we can very much identify here with Rahab and her position.

No matter how respectable we may be outwardly, yet we have to realize that we are identified in this respect, and in this most important respect, we are identified with Rahab.

By nature, we are under the same wrath and curse as she was, as part of that sinful and depraved race of people. But then secondly, we come to look at Rahab's faith.

Now this is one of the main points that is drawn from the life and experience of Rahab in the New Testament. In Hebrews chapter 11, in that great catalogue of the faithful people of Old Testament times, there is a place there for the prostitute Rahab.

And we have that in Hebrews chapter 11. And reading there in verse 31. In other words, it's said quite clearly here that she evidenced faith by her welcoming of these spies and by what she did for them.

[13 : 35] All of that was the fruit of faith on her part. And she here has a part in this great and glorious list of all the Old Testament saints.

Well, what kind of faith was this? What can we discover about it from the passage in Joshua chapter 2? Well, first of all, we see that she had some kind of evidence upon which to base her faith.

To put it in modern terms, she had propositional evidence upon which to base her faith. There were certain things that she knew. There were certain truths that she knew about the people of Israel and about their God.

And her faith was based firmly upon those things. In verse 10, she herself gives us some idea of what I'm meaning. 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 Zion and Og, the two kings of the Ammonites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. And so on. All of that passage where Rahab there is talking, she's recounting what she has heard about the people of Israel and about their God.

[14 : 51] What they have actually done. What is indisputable. The things that have happened. And the way in which they've been brought out of Egypt, the way in which they are now brought there right to the very edge of the land of Canaan.

And she knows that God has promised them that they are to have that land. Now, along with that, she also had the personal testimony and life and witness of the two men there who were staying with her.

She knew something also of them, of the kind of people they were. What kind of people were these who worshiped this God? In other words, she had all these pieces of evidence.

Now, I stress that because so often it's forgotten that faith and evidence are linked together. So often people set faith and evidence against each other.

People talk about blind faith. The idea that you just believe something just in the dark. You don't have any evidence for it at all. Now, that is the idea that people have in their minds today when you use the word faith.

[15:55] People think that it is some kind of leap in the dark. It is some kind of irrational thing. Something totally against reason. But that is not what the Bible means when it talks of faith.

Faith is putting our trust in the things that we know. Things that we have evidence for. Yes, there is an element in faith that we trust about other things maybe that we don't know.

But we do that on the basis of what has already been revealed to us. What we know of God. And here Rahab has her faith grounded firmly on things that took place in history.

Actually, in her own historical time. This movement of the people of Israel out of Egypt and the great way in which God preserved them and looked after them and kept them right there till they were ready to enter into the promised land.

She had all this evidence of God's great power and his power to be able to save. In other words, all the great doctrines that are evidenced by the whole historic movement of the Exodus, such as God's sovereignty and God's salvation.

[17:10] All these things are there in the things that had taken place in Rahab's lifetime. And she was able to see those things, to hear about those things, to think about those things.

And by the grace of God, to come to the conclusion that God, in fact, was the true God. That God, in fact, was doing those things for the children of Israel.

And so, we don't just stress that she had this evidence, but we see that she goes on from that point to actually believe in God. And we see in verses 10 and 11 that she had a belief in God and in his sovereign power to be able to save.

Particularly, we may read in verse 11, When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Now, that, putting it in the context of the time in which Rahab lived, that is the greatest statement that she could make concerning the great sovereign power of God.

[18:25] The gods that she knew and the goddesses that she knew, they were all gods or goddesses of some particular aspect of the natural world. They were limited in some particular way.

The very fact that there were many of them meant that they were limited. One could not sort of cross over into the area of another where he had responsibility.

The great thing about the God, the Lord of the people of Israel that she came to know was that he was the God of heaven and of earth, of the whole universe, in other words.

That's putting it in modern language. He is the God of the whole universe. There is nothing outside of his scope. He has been able to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt, defeating all the gods of Egypt, the great gods of the river Nile, the great gods of the sun and all the rest of it.

That the Egyptians put their faith in. The Lord was able to defeat and put to shame all those ideas of the Egyptians. And he was able to bring the people of Israel, in spite of their own rebelliousness, through all the countries in between.

[19:36] Bring them through all the different lands where different gods were worshipped.

Demonstrating that God was the God of heaven and of earth. God is the God of the whole universe, not limited to any one particular area, one particular land, or one particular natural aspect of the whole world.

So then, Rahab here testifying to her belief that this God is the true God. This God is the God who is able to save and to deliver people, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

In verse 10, we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt. That great and climactic saving event of the time of the time of the Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea.

That was where the salvation of the people of Israel, the rescue from the house of bondage and the land of slavery. That was where it was actually completed when they crossed through the Red Sea on dry land.

So then, she came to believe in this God who is sovereignly powerful to be able to save. And also, she believed in God's promise.

[20 : 53] God promised, we read in verse 9, I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

What was it that was at the heart of this, which among all the other people was causing just great fear and terror? It was the fact that they had heard that this God, the Lord, who was able to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt, this God had promised the land of Canaan to them.

And Rahab believes that promise. The others, maybe half believed that promise and were afraid and in terror because of it. She herself believed it and believed it wholly and believed it gladly.

She believed it gladly because here she could see a God worth believing in. And here she could see the end of all the depravity and all that her life had meant up until that time, all the emptiness and all the frustration and all the bitterness and all the sinfulness.

Here was going to be a new start, a God worth believing in, and a land that was going to be under his law and his jurisdiction. So then we see there something of Rahab's faith and how the Lord worked in different ways to bring her to that point of faith.

[22 : 16] But notice that there is this great emphasis upon the things that God did and the things that God did in history. And that is the same for us today.

Our faith today is just as much grounded in the God of history, in what he has done in the history of this planet, as was the faith of Rahab. She had, we might say, merely the type of the great salvation of God in the Exodus to believe in.

Yet it was a historical happening, something that happened in the history of her time. We today have the great salvation of God in history to think about and to put our faith in.

That is the great salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ when he died on the cross, to bring people out of the land of slavery to sin, out of the house of bondage to evil. The great salvation of which the Exodus, although historical, was only a type and picture.

So then today we are asked to put our faith just as firmly in the things that God has done in history as Rahab was. We are asked today to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross and rose again from the dead, victorious over death.

[23 : 31] And that if we were there that day when Jesus died on the cross, and if we rubbed our finger on the cross, we would have got a splinter of wood in it. Or if we had been like Nicodemus or like Joseph of Arimathea, taking the body of Christ down from the cross, we would have had the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ upon our hands.

And if we were there that day with Mary Magdalene when Jesus rose again from the den, and we fell down at his feet, we would have been able to touch his feet. And if we were there with the twelve when they were with the apostles, when they were sitting in the room where the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them, and we handed him the honey and the fish, we would see him eating it. In other words, what I'm saying is these things are presented to us in the Bible as true and historical, things that have really happened, not fairy tales or inventions or myths, no matter what learned people today may say about them.

So what we're asked today is to believe just as firmly in this God of history, the sovereign God of the universe who has delivered people by that great saving work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. We have the evidence. We have God's word in a far more full way than in which Rahab had it. She was only hearing snippets. She was only hearing rumors and pieces of information from here, there, and everywhere.

[24 : 59] But we have it here complete in God's word. That revelation of God in history laid down for us in writing. How can we have any excuse if Rahab believed on the basis of the evidence that she had?

We have so much more evidence. Our faith is demanded of us now to believe in Jesus Christ and to know the fullness of life that's in him. But also we need to notice, to round the picture, that Rahab's works are also emphasized in Scripture.

And this is particularly the point that James makes in his letter, where in chapter 2 of James and verse 25, he speaks of Rahab in this way, 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?

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. Now, without going into all the details of this great truth that faith must work, we have to stress the point that where Paul talks about being saved by faith alone and where James talks about the necessity of faith working and faith without works being dead, there is no contradiction between the two.

What James is saying here is that faith without works is not really any faith at all. It is not the faith that Paul is speaking about.

[26 : 41] When Paul speaks of faith, he is talking about really a living, true faith, a faith that will produce works. The whole point of what they both are wanting to stress is that salvation is not by simply human effort, what we do.

Salvation is by God's grace. That works faith in our hearts, but true faith in our hearts produces works. It actually produces the good, so to speak.

So we see with Rahab also, her belief in this God who is sovereignly able to deliver people and deliver them from bondage and slavery, it produces fruit in her own life.

First of all, there is the kindness that she shows. After all, who are these two men to her? She could have had great benefit, no doubt, in the city of Jericho and great respect, perhaps publicly, if she had handed these men over to the authorities and said these were spies that had come from the land of Israel and so on.

She could easily have taken that way out. Rather, she showed kindness to the spies. She protected them and she looked after them. Maybe that she went about it in ways that perhaps we wouldn't wholly agree with.

[27 : 57] In other words, her telling of lies and so on. Still, God does not seem to bring that into account in his dealings with her. These things are covered over because, we may say, her whole attitude and her whole heart was right in what she was doing.

Yes, coming out of the kind of background she came from, there were going to be things like this that were going to be a myth, yet God looks on the heart. And we see the way in which she kindly welcomed and kept the spies and kept them safe.

We see there evidence of her belief that God indeed, not only had done those things in the past, but he was going to actually bring the people of Israel into the promised land and that she was, in fact, doing herself no harm at all by favoring the spies and by looking after them.

In other words, she believed that they were going to capture that city of Jericho and if she identified with them, then she was going to be on the right and on the winning side.

We notice also her concern for her family. It wasn't just a case of herself that she herself wanted to escape, that she had sort of become kind of neurotic about her own life and afraid of things that were going to happen.

[29 : 12] She believed firmly in these truths that we've been thinking of, that God was going to bring judgment upon the people of the land and God was able to do it and God was going to bring in the people of Israel in their place.

And so she was concerned also for the whole of her family, anybody that she could save also who would respect what she had to say. So then we see again an evidence of her great faith in God, that she was now working, not just believing in her heart, but also doing things that evidenced that faith. We see also backing this up her obedience to what the spies told her to do. They made a solemn oath, a binding covenant between them and Rahab, and they said that the sign of this was going to be the scarlet cord, probably the rope by which she had let them down over the city wall, that this was to be tied in the window, and that was to be tied there as a sign that this was her house, and it was to be tied there as a sign that she believed that indeed the Israelites were going to come and going to take Jericho.

So again, she believed that and she obeyed what they told her to do. She tied that cord there, and that was, we may say, a mark. She took that step at least of faith in God and faith in what he was doing with Israel by putting that mark on her house for all to see there was something there, something different about that house from now on.

Now, that's just one particular facet of the historical story that we're dealing with here, but yet it has a universal significance for every child of God.

[30 : 58] Once you become a Christian, once you believe in God, there are, of course, things to be done. There are ways in which God is to be obeyed, and particularly we have to stand out as Christians in the world in which we live, not simply sort of drawing attention to ourselves, that kind of thing, for the sake of that, but rather being a Christian, believing in God, doing the things he commands us to do, that in itself will make us stand out.

That in itself will bear a witness in perhaps a hostile environment, and we must follow Rahab's example in doing that. And so finally, we come to look at Rahab's acceptance, her acceptance into the people of God.

In chapter 6 of this same book, we discover that when the Israelites come to take Jericho, we read at verse 25, but Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute with her family and all who belonged to her because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho, and she lives among the Israelites to this day.

In other words, it was emphasized that when this book was being written, sometime just after the time of Joshua, she was still, she and her family were part and partial of this life.

She lived among them to this very day. But more than that, we discover that later on in 1 Chronicles 2 and verse 10, that Rahab married a prince in Israel, Nason, one of the leaders, one of the princes in Israel.

[32 : 42] And more than that, we discover that when we turn to the New Testament and to the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, we discover indeed a very surprising and a very moving thing in verses 4 to 6 of that chapter.

Here we have the line of Jesus' descent being given. Ram, the father of Aminadab, Aminadab, the father of Nason, Nason, the father of Salmon, Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed, the father of Jesse, and Jesse, the father of King David.

In other words, it is brought out there particularly that in this most important genealogy of the whole of the nation of Israel, the most important genealogy in the whole history of the world, Rahab has her place.

And that demonstrates God's acceptance perhaps more clearly than anything else could do. Rahab was accepted into the nation of Israel, not just accepted as one who had sort of rendered services during wartime, that kind of thing, but she was accepted fully and completely.

Nobody could have been accepted more completely than to be accepted into the messianic line, that line that descended from Abraham right through, through David, right through to the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[34 : 21] And that is there, and it's mentioned specifically and deliberately to bring home to us the full and complete acceptance of God. When he accepts someone, when someone believes in Jesus Christ and they are justified by faith in him, it is not a partial acceptance, it is not a grudging acceptance, it is a full and complete acceptance.

We are accepted into the very family of God. And this told us concerning the subsequent history of Rahab is to bring that home to us.

She was there accepted fully into the people of Israel, marrying a prince of Judah, an ancestor of Jesus. And so too, we are to be reminded that when God accepts us by faith in Jesus Christ, he accepts us completely and fully without reservation into his family.

And he accepts us so for all time, for this life and for the life to come, that if we are a child of God here and now, we will always be a child of God.

So complete is God's acceptance of people who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. So then, with all these facets of Rahab's life before us, how can we turn from the great evidence that God has brought before us in his word, turn from the great assurances that God gives us in his word, the great promises, how can we turn from the great completeness of Christ's salvation, the one who is able to save to the uttermost, how can we turn from him and say, no, I want to stay part of this condemned race for which time is running out.

[36 : 15] Let us pray. Amen.