



Text: Joshua 2:1-24¹ Scripture reading: 2:1-15 (v.16-23 in brief) v.24
Series: Joshua -- Facing Life with Courage
Title: Part 2 – Rahab, a Woman of Faith & Courage
Date: May 10, 2009 (Mothers' Day)
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

“And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there.” Joshua 2:1

Some of you, I'm sure are thinking, “what are we doing talking about a woman who was a prostitute on Mothers' Day?”

Well, let me begin by saying that ultimately this story is a story about God's saving grace and it is always appropriate to talk about God's grace regardless of what the calendar says. But let me also say that in the Bible Rahab is not only known as a prostitute. In the very first chapter of the very first book of the New Testament, the Gospel writer Matthew gives us the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Matthew begins his list of Jesus' ancestors by connecting Jesus back to Abraham, the founding father of the Jewish people. As the list of ancestors unfolds, we come to this entry in Matthew's list...

“and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.” Matthew 1:4-6

In Matthew's list there are only four mothers mentioned and one of them is Rahab. According to Matthew's list, Rahab was the great grandmother of King David and therefore was also an ancestor of Jesus. That story line alone is a rich picture of God's grace in bringing this Gentile prostitute into the family of his chosen people and making her a direct ancestor of Jesus.

I want you to notice the name of her son, Boaz. The story of Boaz is found in the Book of Ruth and is one of the most beautiful love stories of all time. I'm going to come back to the Rahab / Boaz connection at the end of my talk this morning and I just want you to remember that Rahab was a prostitute who became a mother of one of the Bible's greatest men, a grandmother of one of the Bible's greatest kings and an ancestor of the greatest Man who has ever lived, Jesus Christ, the Son of David. Her story is a story of God's amazing grace.

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But there's no getting away from the fact that she was a prostitute. Some people have tried to soften this story by suggesting that the word translated "prostitute" is related to a word that means "innkeeper." If you're using an NIV Study Bible you'll see a footnote that suggests this alternative reading. There is a serious linguistic problem with this idea² but we don't have to delve into the Hebrew language to resolve the question. The Bible speaks to it very clearly elsewhere. Rahab is mentioned by two other New Testament writers. The writer of the Book of Hebrews has this to say about her...

**"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**

And James, the brother of Jesus, referred to her in his discussion about the nature of saving faith being a faith that always expresses itself in action. James was arguing, as Martin Luther put it, that we are saved by faith alone but never by a faith that is alone. Real faith always finds a way to show itself in the choices we make about how we live our lives. James calls those faith-based choices "works." He wrote about Rahab...

**"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**

Both accounts use the same Greek word to describe Rahab's occupation and the word is unambiguous. It quite simply tells us that she sold herself. But James and the writer of Hebrews also both point to Rahab as a woman of faith whose faith was expressed in dynamic action. In their Holy Spirit inspired estimation, **Rahab the prostitute was a woman of faith and courage.** Her faith was a costly faith. It was a faith that called from her courageous action. At great risk to herself she protected the Jewish spies who had come to scout out the land in advance of Joshua and rest of the army. And by her action she not only saved herself, but she also saved her whole family, her father and mother, her sisters and brothers, her nieces and nephews and even those who might have worked for her father.

Today we're celebrating the impact mothers have for the Lord on their families and here we have a woman whose faith saved her family from destruction. Some of you women here today, like Rahab, are the only people of faith in your families. Some of you have fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, nieces

² The contention that she was merely an innkeeper is based on finding the root of this participial in *zân* "to feed," rather than *zânâ*; but for this little evidence exists. R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980), 246.



and nephews who are not believers. Others of you have husbands and children and even grandchildren who are not believers in Jesus. I want you to be encouraged by Rahab's story today. By God's grace, your faith might be the instrument that God uses to draw those members of your family to faith in Christ and I want to encourage you to live lives of courageous faith. The same could be said of some of you men, as well. Rahab's story tells us that God can use solitary believers to impact their families, their workplaces and their communities if those believers will live lives of courageous faith.

We've come to this story in the Book of Joshua because we began a study of this book last week, not because I selected this passage for Mothers' Day. The Book of Joshua encourages us to "Be Strong and Courageous" – that phrase is repeated several times in the book -- and as we walk through our study of this portion of God's Word we're asking God to teach us about being courageous as we face the challenges of life. So the main question this morning isn't what can we glean from Rahab's story that is applicable for Mothers' Day. The central question we need to address as we come to this story is "what roles does this story play in the unfolding story of the Book of Joshua?" **What can Rahab teach us about living with courageous faith?**

And that question leads us back to the word, "prostitute."

I don't think in God's sovereign plan that it was coincidental that the two spies found their way to Rahab's door. Let's be clear: the language of the text clearly indicates that there was no immoral purpose behind their being in her home. For two strangers who didn't want to answer questions about their identity or their business, her home was a good place to remain anonymous.

But there is something appropriate in the fact that a prostitute was the first convert to faith in the true God in the land of Canaan. In Moses' last days, God had spoken to him about the challenges that Israel would face in conquering the land and in staying faithful to him. God looked into the future and sadly saw his people becoming unfaithful to him and wandering away. He said to Moses...

"Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods." Deuteronomy

31:16-18



God saw that his people would “prostitute” themselves to the worship of foreign gods. And so God commanded his people to do something that we find very difficult to accept. It’s a truth from God’s Word that we need to face. It’s an expression of God’s holy anger against sin. It’s a command that was motivated by the purity of his wrath against those who refused to acknowledge him as God. It was motivated by his anger against those who intentionally led his people astray from their faith in him. This was God’s command to Israel...

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly... For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.” Deuteronomy 7:1-4, 6

As we make our way through Joshua we will encounter this command in action many times and it gets tough to handle. The residents of Jericho, the people of Ai, of Hazor and many other towns and cities were “devoted to destruction” by Israel. The people, and sometimes even the livestock of these communities, were destroyed because of their rebellion against the Lord. There were to be no covenants made with them. In other words, there were to be no peace treaties with them. They were to be destroyed. There was to be no mercy shown them. They were to be destroyed. Those who remained alive, probably those who lived outside the towns and cities, were not to be married. God’s command was clear: No covenants, no mercy, no marriage.

Why were these people groups to be destroyed? Because “they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods.” (v.4) Please understand:

This was not genocide; this was God’s judgment against sin

For seven hundred years God had waited to give this land to the descendants of Abraham. When God had made the promise of the land to Abraham he had given him a rough timeline and had explained to him that the reason why he was delaying the gift of the land was because...

“the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” Genesis 15:16

Well, now it was complete. God used the term “Amorites” as a kind of shorthand to refer to all the people groups of the land of Canaan. Israel’s conquest of the



land would not only serve to provide them with a home but we need to understand that the edges of their swords and the fire from their torches would also serve as God's judgment against the "iniquity" of these nations. There is something awful in the stories of conquest in the Book of Joshua that makes it a tough book to study. Over the years there have been many attempts to soften the hard edges of the accounts of destruction. But I do not believe that we can escape the reality that in this book we are brought face to face again and again with death and destruction on a wholesale basis as a judgment of God against wickedness. Whole communities are destroyed, one after another. No covenants. No mercy. No marriage.

But then there's Rahab. As God's army is about to bring his judgment down upon the Amorites, one "Amorite" is shown mercy. One Amorite receives a covenant promise. One Amorite eventually marries into the people of promise. Why this Amorite? Why Rahab? The answer is simple: because of her faith in God. What kind of faith did she have?

First of all,

Rahab had a courageous faith that was based on the mighty acts of God

She told the spies...

"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..." Joshua 2:10-11

The people of the land had heard two important truths about Israel and her God. They had heard that God was a God of salvation and that God was a God of judgment. Later in Joshua, in chapter nine, we encounter people from another community in the land who had heard exactly the same things about the God of Israel. (c.f. Joshua 9:9-10) It seems that word had spread far and wide throughout the land of Canaan.

They had heard that **the LORD is a God of salvation**. They had heard how God had saved his people from slavery in Egypt. Rahab and the others in Jericho had heard about the way that God had opened up the sea and had led Israel out of Egypt on dry land. They had heard about the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea. They had probably, then, also heard about how God had destroyed the armies of Egypt when the water of the Red Sea collapsed upon them. The people of Canaan might have heard about the other miracles God had done to deliver his people: the plagues, the provision of water and manna. We don't know the exact content of their knowledge but they did know about God's mighty hand of salvation in bringing his people out of slavery in Egypt.



They had also heard that **the LORD is a God of judgment**. They had heard how God had judged two kings who lived on the border of their land, Sihon and Og. Rahab spoke of Israel having “devoted to destruction” these two kings but it was clear that they had done it because God had commanded it. In the ears of the people of Jericho, the God of Israel was a fearsome and mighty God and it made them quake in their boots. They were terror stricken. But above all, please notice that they believed it. They weren’t terror stricken by fear of the boogey man; their hearts melted within them and their courage vanished because they knew they were up against a force greater than anything they had ever encountered before.

What should this information have told them about the Lord? This is what God says it should have told them...

“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him... know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.” Deuteronomy 4:32-35,39

This is important. Because the destruction that is about to come upon the people of this land will come upon a people who know. They have heard of God’s salvation. They have heard of God’s judgment. They have heard all they need to hear to know that the nation approaching their borders comes to them in the might and in the name of the LORD God Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth. They know enough that they should bow in worship ... but they don’t! As we encounter city after city and nation after nation in this book, their response is not worship but rebellion. They refuse to acknowledge God...

But Rahab does.

And we need to “lay in our hearts” the truths of God’s mighty work. These acts of God need to become the foundation for courageous faith in our lives.

Yes, we need to be gripped with the awesome might of our God who reached into history to bring his people out of slavery in Egypt, but we have an even greater display of God’s outstretched arm of salvation in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the work of Jesus Christ, God reached into



history to save us from slavery to sin, a slavery that was dragging us to eternal destruction. But by the cross and the mighty resurrection of Jesus, God saved us from his wrath against sin.

If we want a truly courageous faith, we need these demonstrations of God's power imbedded in our hearts. Without these truths laid deep in our spirit, our faith won't have the strength to stand when we're faced with the challenges of life.

Second,

Rahab had a courageous faith grounded in the uniqueness of the Lord as the only God

She tells the spies...

“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 2:11

What truth was it that God said was conveyed by knowing about his mighty work of bringing Israel out of Egypt?

“that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.” Deuteronomy 4:39

Rahab got it! She understood. She believed. We're not told when it was that Rahab came to this understanding. It was clearly some time before the spies showed up at her door. She had already defended them and hidden them from the King of Jericho. It was after that that she came up onto her roof, engaged the spies in conversation and declared her faith in the Lord.

There's a very New Testament flavour to this moment in the story. The Apostle Paul tells us that the decisive conviction that saves us from the wrath of God against our sin is the same declaration that Rahab made on her roof to those two men. Paul tells us that...

“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.... For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Romans 10:9, 12-13

Rahab's faith was simple: “The LORD, he is God. The LORD, he is God.” (1 Kings 18:39) And there is other! That was her salvation. The writer of Hebrews tells us that...



**“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**

Rahab’s salvation from destruction was found in her faith in the LORD God. The rest of the residents of Jericho had heard the same things Rahab had heard, but she had believed them, while they had been “disobedient” to the message.

Rahab believed in the Lord.

“There is no other.” We live in a day of religious pluralism where the message is that there are many gods and many ways to the gods. I’ve often heard it said that we have grown as a society in our religious understanding out of the simple-minded singularity of one god. Grown? The world in which Rahab lived was a world of many gods. In order to come to faith in the LORD, Rahab needed to choose to reject the gods of Jericho, the gods of her family and declare her allegiance to the LORD as the only God.

If we want courageous faith, we need to be clear about this. There is no other God but the Lord God Almighty! There is no other God but the LORD! “Jesus is Lord” and there is other! If we waver on this conviction, our faith will lack the strength to stand.

Third,

Rahab had a faith that expressed itself in action

Rahab’s faith was not a “words only” faith. It was a faith that expressed itself in action. In fact, it expressed itself in action before she ever spoke it to a single soul.

Her **first faith-based action** was that **she welcomed the spies.**

As Hebrews puts it, she gave “a friendly welcome” to them. (Heb.11:31) James tells us that she was acting out her faith “when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.” (James 2:25)

Notice that she is commended for protecting the spies, not for the way in which she protected them. She clearly lied to the king of Jericho when he asked her about the spies and she risked her life in her defense of these men. The Bible does not comment on the rightness or wrongness of her action here, it merely records it. We’re left to determine whether it was right or wrong by evaluating it on the basis of what God says about truthfulness elsewhere in Scripture. But whether or not we agree with her methods, we can’t fail to acknowledge her courage. She put her life on the line by defending them.

Rahab told the spies, **“I have dealt kindly with you...” (v.12)**



Rahab doesn't refer to her support for the spies as simply giving them a welcome. She called it dealing "kindly" with them. The word Rahab used for "kindness" is a very important Old Testament word. It's often used of God's care for his own people. It's sometimes translated as "loyal love." Rahab's kindness was an expression of her new faith in the God of Israel whose kindness she longed to experience. Her welcome of the spies was a practical declaration of her faith in the Lord. Long before she spoke her faith to the spies on her roof, she demonstrated her faith in her actions.

She reminds us of Jesus' teaching that whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked or welcome strangers, we're demonstrating our love to the Lord himself. (c.f. Matthew 24:34ff) When you offer a meal or a cup of coffee out of compassion for someone in need you're acting out your faith in the Lord. Your showing them the Lord's "kindness."

Rahab's **second faith-based action** was that **she saved her family.**

She said to the 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." Joshua 2:12-

13

She asked the spies to show her the same "loyal love" that she had shown to them and she accepted their promise. The spies promised that when the day came that Jericho would fall they would personally safeguard her life and the lives of her family.

They told her that she needed to do two things. First, she needed to hang "a scarlet cord" from her window, (v.18), marking her house to the army of Israel. It might simply have been a way to mark her house but some have seen an allusion in the scarlet colour of the cord to the blood of Christ. A more likely allusion might be to the blood that the Israelites spread over their doors on Passover night in Egypt. (c.f. Ex 12:7) This possibility is supported by the second stipulation that the spies asked of Rahab. They told her that in order for her family to be saved, they needed to be gathered with her in her house and they were not to leave the house, something that is similar to what was commanded on Passover night. (c.f. Ex 12:22)

Whether or not these instruction have a "deeper meaning" or not, they required faith-based courage. Hanging the cord from her window wasn't a great challenge, but gathering her family was risky. She would need courage to talk with them about the promise of the spies, she would need courage to talk with



them about her conviction that the Lord was giving the land to Israel and that Jericho would be defeated. She risked having family members laugh in her face or worse, report her to the king of Jericho. But they listened to her, and on the day that Jericho fell, they were with Rahab and were saved. (c.f. Joshua 6:25)

Some of you are faced with the same challenge and you need the same courage. You have family members you would love to see come to know the Lord. They could laugh at you. They could reject you. Or they could listen to you and be saved by putting their trust in Christ.

I'd like to suggest that there is a **third faith-based action** that Rahab demonstrated but it's not one recorded here in Joshua chapter 2. I mentioned at the beginning of the message that Rahab had a son by the name of Boaz. I would suggest that one of her greatest demonstration of her faith was that **she raised a child.**

We don't have time this morning to tell the whole story of Ruth and Boaz. But let me tell you this about Boaz. He was a man who kept a promise, even when it could have been costly to him. (c.f. Ruth 4:5-10). He was a man who treated vulnerable women with respect and protection. (cf. Ruth 2:8-9) He was a man who took as his wife a woman of courageous faith, a woman just like his mother who wasn't Jewish by birth but who chose to declare her allegiance to the God of Israel. (c.f. Ruth 2:11-12) He was a man who trusted in the Lord his God and lived out his faith with integrity. Rahab raised a son who was considered by his community to be...

“a worthy man...whose name was Boaz.” Ruth 2:1

Rahab the prostitute raised a son who was respected by his peers. He was a pillar of his community. He demonstrated great integrity in his business and relationships. Whatever failings Rahab might have had before she came to know the Lord, the quality of her son's life is a testimony to his mother's character and faith. We don't know anything about Salmon, her husband. Salmon was probably a man of quality – it would take a man of quality to marry a woman of such courage and faith! Let me just say on this Mothers Day that one of the greatest expressions of a mother's faith can be the raising of children who know the Lord and whose lives reflect the integrity of their faith. And one of the best ways to honour the faith of our mothers is to share it.

There is something very much of the spirit of the New Testament about Rahab's story. Jesus said, to some of the people in his day...

“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.” Matthew 21:31



Long before Jesus spoke these words, a prostitute by the name of Rahab found her way into the kingdom of God. James Montgomery Boice pointed out that our experience of God's grace is parallel to Rahab's story. In fact, he wrote that **"we are Rahab if we truly understand her story."**³

Just like Rahab, Boice wrote, we all face the judgment of God and we deserve it. We are sinners and rebels against God who by rights are "devoted to destruction." We are all, as the Apostle Paul wrote...

"by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Ephesians 2:3

But God's promise is that all those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved from destruction by his grace and mercy and love. Although we have been born as "children of wrath" we can become "children of God" through faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle John tells us God gives to everyone who believes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...

"the right to become children of God...." John 1:12

God has always chosen to show his mercy and grace to those who know they need it. Rahab is a picture of God's amazing grace.

Sadly, we forfeit the grace that could be ours when we refuse to bow our knees to the Lord. We close the door on God's kindness because we would rather laugh in his face. We shut ourselves off from the promise of God because we would rather believe the lies of sin and rebellion.

Just as God's people were about to engage in a time of judgment, God made sure to include this story of grace and mercy to remind us that judgment only comes because of our obstinate refusal to acknowledge God as God.

But Rahab reminds us of that even on the doorstep of judgment, God's offer of mercy is still open to all who will respond.

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:**
 - O How He Loves You & Me
 - Grace Greater Than Our Sin
- **Benediction**

³ James Montgomery Boice, Joshua: An Expository Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1989. p. 33