

Example of Rahab

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- [0:00] Take your scriptures and turn to Joshua chapter 2. We're going to read chapter 2 of Joshua. Then Joshua, son of Nun, secretly sent two spies from Shittim.
- Go look over the land, he said, especially Jericho. So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.
- The king of Jericho was told, look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land. So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab.
- Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land. But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them.
- She said, yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went.
- [0:59] Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them. But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax that she laid out on the roof.
- So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan. And as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, 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.
- 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 Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.
- When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.
- Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.
- [2:26] Our lives for your lives, the men assured her. If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land.
- So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. Now she had said to them, Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you.
- Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way. The men said to her, This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us, unless when we enter the land you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers, and all your family into your house.
- If anyone goes outside your house, into the street, his blood will be on his own head, and we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him.

But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear. Agreed, she replied. Let it be as you say. So she sent them away, and they departed, and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

[3:49] When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. Then the two men started back.

They went down out of the hills, forded the river, and came to Joshua, son of Nun, and told him everything that had happened to them. They said to Joshua, The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands.

All the people are melting in fear because of us. Let's hear the word preached. So far in Joshua, we've seen two good examples.

Be like Joshua. He was a soldier, a servant, sold out, spirit-filled. And last week we saw be like Israel, be like those two and a half tribes who had committed to obeying and to helping their brothers take the land.

And when the time came for their brothers to go up into the land and to begin to fight and conquer it, they put on their swords.

[4:58] They left their homes. They left the safety, the comfort that they had already been enjoying, and they stepped into harm's way. They did what they said they would do. They kept their commitments to each other, to their brothers.

And so be like Joshua. Be like those two and a half tribes of Israel. And those are good examples and sounds good. But what if I told you that we need to follow the example of a Canaanite prostitute?

So moms, how would you like to sit your young ladies down and say, daughter, here's a woman that you want to imitate.

Here's a woman that you want to be like. A Canaanite prostitute. Well, she gave her body away for money.

The Samaritan woman that Jesus met at the well of Sychar, at Jacob's well, at least followed the formalities of marriage to some extent.

[6:06] This, Rahab didn't even bother with that. And some people think that even the scarlet rope that we just read about very well could have been a calling card, an advertisement for her business, something that she would have hung outside of her window on more than one occasion.

After all, it's not like the spies probably came in with a bright red rope. And it's not an item that people would normally have lying around. And so that very well could have been her calling card.

Some commentators are so careful to say that she used to be a prostitute. But she wasn't anymore when we meet her in Joshua 2. And so they compare her to Simon the leper in the New Testament who used to be a leper, but now he wasn't anymore.

But the name stuck. And so they say that's kind of what Rahab, the prostitute, is like. But I think that misses the whole point of why the spies go to her house.

The whole reason for the spies going there was it was normal for strange men to come into her house and leave in all hours of the day. And so these spies would have just been two of many and shouldn't have drawn any suspicion.

[7:27] And so I guess we find this tendency in all of us to want to rehabilitate people, to make them sound better than what they are or were.

And I would just want to say that that is God's job and he does a fine job of it with Rahab. And we don't do God any justice and we don't do the truth of Rahab any justice in her story by making her seem better than what she was.

And the truth is if any one of us is ever going to get to heaven, we have to become like her in her faith. But don't take my word for it.

You can take James, the brother of Jesus, his word for it. He said, 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. We have to have Rahab-like faith or we're as good as a corpse.

[8 : 38] No life in us. And in that great hall of faith in Hebrews 11 where it's giving witness after witness of people who lived and acted out of faith, it's not Abraham or Isaac or Moses that gets the last mention, the last specific reference to what they did.

It's Rahab. And Rahab is one of these witnesses that we read about in Hebrews 12 that is cheering on the people of God and saying, it's worth it to believe.

It's worth it to persevere. You can trust in God. And so we press on and Rahab is one of those people that is cheering us on the way. And we see her life of faith, her great act of faith in this chapter.

She changed sides at great risk to herself. She did something drastic.

She forsook her life, her people, everything she knew. She left it behind her and she joined God's people. She left her gods and like Ruth said, your God will be my God.

[9 : 50] Your people will be my people. So Rahab left all to save herself. She left everything to save herself.

And so what about you? Jesus said, if you want to save your life, you have to be willing to lose it. You have to lose it. If you're willing to lose that old life, that life that you come into this life with, that life apart from God, there is a whole other, whole better life waiting for you.

And Rahab's story, as it progresses through the whole Bible and as we see her complete history, shows us just how far God can rehabilitate a Canaanite prostitute growing up in Jericho, worshipping Baal, and yet she changed sides.

So have you. Well, how did this surprising conversion come about? How did Rahab the prostitute go from that to becoming one of the great, great grandmothers of Jesus Christ?

Because we know in Matthew that there's, I think there's three women mentioned. And each of them have something that's noticeably bad about them.

[11 : 12] And Rahab is one of them. She's one of Jesus' great, great grandmothers. So let's look at it tonight. How did that happen? The first chapter in this story tonight is what we're going to call a surprising ally.

So chapter one in Rahab's story is the surprising ally. In verse one, Joshua sends in two spies to look at the land, especially Jericho. Remember, God had said, in three days you're going to cross the river.

So, notice he wants it done secretly. It's supposed to be a secret spy mission. And it's only two spies this time.

How many spies was it last time? It was 12. And it didn't work out very well. And I think maybe, I don't know if Joshua is thinking about that, but he's thinking, I'm not going to send in 12 again and risk a previous failure.

I'm going to send in two men that I know will not come back with a message that will scare the people. And so he probably sent in two men he could trust. Well, what kind of men were they?

[12 : 22] We don't know a lot about them. I read one article comparing them to, you know, Green Berets or the Navy Seals. These were Joshua's elite men, the best of the best.

But I think if you read the passage and pay attention to what is there, carefully, you really hope the Navy Seals are better than these guys. Because if our Navy Seals are like them, then we're in big trouble.

Because no sooner do they come into Jericho than someone spots them and knows exactly who they are, what they're doing, where they came from.

They don't manage to do this secretly at all. It's as if they went to the James Bond school of spying where you walk in the front door and you tell everyone your name.

I'm James Bond. They're immediately spotted. They're immediately trapped. They're immediately cornered in a house. The king of Jericho finds out about them and he wants them. And that's when Rahab enters the story.

[13:28] And you see as you read through the whole story, it's these men who are leaning on and needing Rahab to come through for them. And it's Rahab's wits and it's Rahab's words and Rahab's plans that save them.

But the king of Jericho sends Rahab a message, bring out the men who came to you and entered your house because they have come to spy out the whole land. Now, this is where we have to think.

If you are almost anyone else in the town of Jericho, if you're anyone else practically in the whole world, what are you going to do?

You're going to hand the spies over. If the president of the United States says, you have two foreign spies living in your house, they need to come out, I'm sure you would send them out.

You would turn them over. That's what anyone and everyone would do. And you have to remember that there is a huge Israelite army 14 miles away that has already conquered two kingdoms, two kings.

[14:35] And everyone knows that eventually that huge army is coming to Jericho because Jericho is the front door to the promised land.

land. It had to fall if you wanted to take the land. And so spies for an army that is getting ready to destroy your city show up on your doorstep and the king says to you, hand them over.

What are you going to do? You're going to open the door, say, go get them. But that's not what happened.

Rahab had already turned. Rahab had already switched sides and instead of turning them over, she becomes the surprising ally. She had already made some very quick decisions.

She obviously found out who they were. Whether they told her or she figured it out, we don't know. She already knew who they were. She already knew where they came from.

[15:42] And verse six says that when the king and his messenger came, they were already hidden up on the roof. She had seen that this was coming. That people were going to see them, people were going to find out, people were going to come for them.

And when the king's messenger came knocking, they were already up on the roof hiding under the stalks of flax. So just take that in.

They are spies for an army ready to destroy the city that you live in. She knew they were in trouble.

She knew the king would find out. And they were hid before he even got there. And that's what I'm talking about here is a surprising ally. A surprising ally.

These two apparently less than professional spies land right on the doorstep of a woman who by any rights and under any normal circumstances would hand them straight over, but she doesn't.

[16:47] And the king's messenger knocks on the front door, bring out those men, and the men are already hiding on the roof, and what does she do next?

She lies her head off. is what she does. And that has caused no amount or so much consternation from so many people.

How could James and Hebrews commend her faith when she lies? Is it okay to ever lie? And then there's all these ethical debates, and people talk about the Nazis at the door, and things like that.

But the bottom line is that she lies. Look at verse 4. Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from.

Lie. At dusk, when it was time to close the gate, the men left. Lie. I don't know which way they went. Lie. Hurry up.

[17:55] If you hurry up, you go after them quickly, and you could catch up with them. I don't know if that's a lie or just really bad advice. It's obviously deceit.

And so, was that line right or wrong? I'm going to give my answer in a few minutes. But for now, I just want you to see that they found a surprising ally.

They found someone to help them when they didn't see her coming. They didn't see help coming from here. And really, when Joshua and the rest of Israel found out, that must have been so encouraging to them.

Because when they went into the land, they were going to a place that God already was. God was already at work. The Lord of heaven and earth was already there.

And there's a lesson there for us. God is at work in our lives. God is at work in our world. And we might not know it.

[19:00] We might not see it ahead of time. We only see the next step. And even that one is very tentative. But just because we haven't arrived at a time or we haven't arrived at a place doesn't mean that God isn't already there, already preparing, already working, getting things ready for us.

And so when we move, we don't move to a place that God isn't already. And when we get a new job or go to a new school, we aren't going to a place where God isn't already preparing the way ahead of us.

So Joshua, Israel, they didn't know. They didn't know what they were going to meet. But with Rahab, they got to see something ahead of time. They got to see that God was there.

God was at work. He was in that land already. And that must have been so encouraging. They needed help and out of nowhere, God sent help.

Just because we don't see where help could ever come from, doesn't mean that God doesn't know where exactly he's going to bring it from. Doesn't mean that God doesn't see where he's going to bring it to us from.

[20:22] And so we so often are like these spies. We're stumbling into the future. We're stumbling into a strange place, a strange future.

But brothers and sisters, God is already there at work. At work. And so what should we do? Well, isn't that exactly what Joshua 1 was all about?

Be strong and courageous. There's fighting ahead. There's cities ahead. There's giants ahead. There's all sorts of obstacles ahead. And yet, when we know that God is already there, that gives us faith in order that we could go forward.

We can be strong and courageous. And so we don't give in to fear, but we advance in hope. The God of the present is the God of the future. And the God of the here is the God of the there.

And so what do we do? We go forward. So that's point one. We find a surprising ally. Now chapter two, a sudden switch.

[21 : 29] A sudden switch. And so Rahab lied. She looked the messenger in the face and she lied and she lied and she lied. Well, was it wrong?

Well, to answer that question, I think we need to see what happens next in the story. or it happens next in the story. But I think what happened, I think verses eight through 14 is something that has already taken place.

You notice it says before the spies lay down for the night. She's saying, the author is saying before they went up on the roof, before they were getting covered up with the flax, this is what happened.

This conversation happened. It happens before she sends the king's men on a wild goose chase. And it's only given to us now because it's the explanation of why she did what she did.

So the answer is that she had switched sides. Something had happened. She'd given herself to God and to his people.

[22 : 38] She'd gone from a worshiper of God. She'd given up her native gods now to worship the Lord of heaven and earth. And she had broken her native, her natural, her born faith with Jericho.

And she's given herself to a new people, to a new God. And she didn't lie because she was trying to save her own skin. She lied because she had switched loyalties.

And so look at what it says. I know that the Lord has given this land to you. She is saying that to two spies that are hiding on her roof.

She says, these spies aren't very impressive, but I know where you come from. I know your God. And I know that he's given this land to you.

That's faith. She saw God's power and she believed. But it's not just that. Faith is not just seeing God's power and believing that he's strong. she saw God's purpose and his plan and she didn't fight it.

[23 : 43] She wasn't the only one afraid in Jericho. But she's the only one that surrendered. She was the only one that laid down her arms and instead of fighting against God and his cause and opposing his plan, she joins him.

And then she recounts everything she knows. We're all terrified. We've seen what your God has done already. He's dried up the Red Sea. He's brought you out of Egypt.

And Egypt is the superpower of the area. He's given you Sihon and Og, those kings of the Amorites. And you can look at verse 10. When we heard it, our hearts melted.

And everyone's courage failed because of you. Why did their hearts melt? And their courage fail. For the Lord, your God, is God in heaven above and on earth below.

She didn't see the armies of Israel so much as the God who is behind those armies. Don't miss it.

[24 : 54] Everyone else in Jericho, all of her friends, probably all of her relatives, thought there were lots of gods. Every nation had their own high god with the surrounding council of gods around them.

But each of those sets of gods were tied to a specific area. So Canaan had their own little gods that ruled over them, that had jurisdiction over the land of Canaan.

And Egypt had their own set of gods. But that's what everyone else thought. But here is Rahab, not a philosopher, not a theologian.

But she's saying that's not it at all. The Lord, your God, is God in heaven above and on earth below. He's not a local god. He's one.

God alone. And my old gods, they're not gods at all. The whole earth is God's jurisdiction. And he's given you this land, and so you will have it.

[25:57] And then in verse 12, she says, swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I've shown kindness to you. It's easy to miss in English, but in Hebrew, the kindness there is that wonderful Hebrew word *chesed*, covenant love.

covenant faithfulness, the kind of love, covenant love that God has for his people. And so she's not asking just for a good turn, be nice to my family, and I'll be nice to you.

She's asking for them to swear to God above that they will treat her like one of their own. Treat me like an Israelite.

Don't let me and my family die with all these other people. Treat us like one of you. And in verse 14, the spies say, don't tell where we're going, and we will treat you kindly and faithfully.

We will treat you with *chesed*. You treat us with that kind of love, and we will treat you with that kind of love. Now, what I think helps us to understand this passage is it's completely couched, it's completely shot through with covenant language.

[27:26] It's that *chesed* love, covenant love. It talks about swearing oaths. It talks about giving a sign. She is making a covenant with these two spies and with God.

She's switching allegiances. She's switching gods. She's giving up her old life, and she's taking up a new one. She's giving herself completely to God.

She's on his side now. And so was it wrong for her to lie? Was it wrong for her to deceive the king? And my answer is no, because she did it out of a higher loyalty to God.

She did it out of an allegiance to God. Some people will say, but she didn't trust in the Lord. If she would have trusted in God, couldn't God have saved the spies?

And they say her faith was weak here, and that's why she lied. But I think that misses the point entirely. She lied to God's enemies because she was committed to God.

[28:35] She was siding with God against his enemies in a war. And you see the same sort of thing, not just here, but you see it in Exodus where the Hebrew midwives, they deceive Pharaoh when he's trying to kill the babies, and God rewards them.

The same sort of thing happens in 2 Kings 10 when Jehu deceives all the prophets of Baal and the priests of Baal. He comes to the throne and he says, you know what, I'm going to be a bigger worshiper of Baal than Ahab was before me.

So I want everyone to come to one place. Meet me at this certain place, we're going to have a great sacrifice. And he says, I'm so committed to Baal, if you don't show up, if you don't show up, you'll be killed.

And then when they were all in one place, he surrounded that place with soldiers. And he said, if one of them escapes, it's on your head. And God didn't say, you shouldn't have lied.

You shouldn't have killed. You didn't trust me. Couldn't I take care of them without resorting to lying and killing? No, he said, because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes.

[29:57] Your descendants will sit on the throne for four generations. You see it in Judges with Jael. Remember, the fleeing Sisera, the fleeing general of the army, runs by her tent and she says, come in.

Don't be afraid. Should he have been afraid at that moment? Yeah. Don't be afraid. I'm thirsty. Can I have some water? And she says, here, here's some milk.

Guard the front door of the tent. Okay, I'll do that. And when he fell asleep, she set up camp.

And no one says of jail, you shouldn't have broken the sixth commandment. Couldn't God have taken care of Sisera? You shouldn't have doubted. The Hebrew midwives, Jehu, Jael, Rahab, they all take their stand, with God.

They all showed their allegiance and loyalty to the Lord. And in each and every case, the Lord rewarded them. Now, does that mean that the Bible's overwhelmingly huge emphasis about lying is just obliterated?

[31:16] Well, not at all. 99.999% of lies are not like this at all. This is the rare exception. 99.99% of the time, we lie because we're committed to us.

The child lies because the greatest commitment in her or his heart at that moment is to me. I don't want to get in trouble. I want to save my own skin. I'm devoted to me.

I'm trying to help myself or hurt others. We lie because we don't have faith. we're committed to ourselves and not to God. But that's not exactly what we see here.

And this is just to say that the commandments of God are not divorced from God himself. The commandments are not somehow objective without any reference to God.

We don't sin against some sort of abstract law or abstract capital T truth. We sin against God, a person, a being in heaven, who we are always either acting out our commitment to him or we are acting out our commitment to ourselves.

[32:30] But when the messenger at the door and with the spies hiding on her roof, the easiest, the safest thing to do for Rahab at that moment is to tell the truth.

to say come on in and watch them arrested. That's what commitment to self and self-preservation would have looked like.

But commitment to God in that moment looked like doing everything she could to protect them. And that's why James commends her. And that's why the book of Hebrews commends her.

her. And so she was keeping covenant. That's what that was. When she protected them and she deceived them and sent the king's messengers away.

In that moment she was doing what she said she was going to do. She was keeping covenant with those two spies. She was acting like an Israelite. She believed that God was going to give Israel the land.

[33:33] She trusted him. She sided with him at great risk to herself. Not knowing if any of it was going to pay off but trusting God she acted. And I said this at the beginning that we all have to become like Rahab if we're ever going to be saved.

And this is what I'm talking about. She laid down her old life. She laid down her old commitments and in living active faith she switched sides.

And that's what saving faith does. That's what repentance looks like. So the question I keep asking myself in all those situations and we're constantly being confronted with it.

We either act out our loyalty to ourself or we act out loyalty to God. We're doing it all of the time. So who has your loyalty? Who has your commitment?

Who has your covenant love? We all come into this world loyal to me. Covenant promised, loving, committed to number one.

[34:45] And saving faith is entering into a new covenant. It's giving our heart and our love and our faithfulness to someone else other than ourselves. That's why salvation is of the Lord because that bond, that tie to that love of self, that commitment to self is so strong, that it takes a power outside of ourselves to finally break us free and giving us heart that will not see God as my enemy, but seeing God as the one that I have, I'm going to live for.

To say with Ruth, your God is my God. Your people are my people. One of the questions that we often ask people when we're interviewing them is, do you find that God's people are your people?

Do you feel like you belong? Do you feel like you're one of them? Well, there was Rahab in Jericho and yet her heart and she had already given herself to a new people, to a new God.

And when the spies came out, it gave her faith a chance to act and she acted. That's chapter two, a sudden switch. Now chapter three, it's very brief.

A sure sign. A sure sign. In verse 12, she says, these promises are good, but I want a sign. A sure sign. And in verse 17, they say, here's the sign, here's what it's going to be.

[36:15] Here's what will tie us together in covenant love. Here's what will bind us together. Here's what will seal this covenant. And it's a scarlet, it's a blood red cord. It's a bright scarlet rope that she let them down her window with.

And they say, leave it here hanging in the window and we'll see it and we'll spare you and anyone in your house. Now, if that scarlet rope was indeed her calling card that now has been wonderfully transformed, it's been, it's gone from a sign of the mark of her sin to the mark of her faith in God, her covenant loyalty to his people.

And so just like the blood over the door in the Passover, when judgment came to Egypt, so this blood red cord was now the sign, was the seal that was going to protect Rahab.

And it was going to be the sign that bound her to God's people. So anyone hiding under that cord was saved. Because judgment was coming to Jericho.

And God is going to say, destroy the whole city. Everything in it, all of it is devoted to me. Wrath was coming to Jericho.

[37:41] And there was only one safe place in that whole city. And it was under that red, scarlet rope. hope. And isn't that just a picture of Jesus Christ?

Isn't it a picture of the cross? Again and again we see judgment coming. And there's only one safe place. It's under the blood. It's hiding in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who became sin for us.

sin for And in his bloody death, it sealed us to God, God to us, and all of us to one another. So Rahab hung all of her hopes on that one rope.

That blood red rope was going to be her salvation. And that's what we've done. Sinners. Sinners as bad as Rahab.

As committed to myself as Rahab ever was. And Rahab found safety under that rope, we're going to find out. And we too have found safety room under the blood of Jesus.

[38:54] And the gospel is that there's still room. There's still room. You know, salvation is not, it's not about courage. It's not about doing something great to save yourself.

Salvation is hiding. It's hiding. It's cowering in fear under Jesus.

It's seeing wrath coming and you flee into the basement. You flee into the crawl space because you know you can't survive the wrath. And so you go to the place of safety and salvation is doing exactly that.

it's running. It's hiding in Jesus. A lot of people in Jericho tried to fight God.

And all of them lost. But there was one who surrendered and hid. And she and her family was saved. That's how salvation works.

[40:00] That's how we can all be saved. That's how you can be saved. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for its clarity and for how it shows us Jesus. Truly every story and every page whispers his name in one way or the other.

We thank you for this picture of Rahab. This picture of courageous acting faith. And we would pray that you would give us that kind of faith that would not be committed to ourselves but would be committed and loyal to you.

We do pray that you would unite our hearts to fear you. Unite our hearts to serve you. For so many of us, we find that we are committed and we do believe and we do love.

And yet, we want to do so more. give us fuller hearts, greater faith. And for those who do not know, who are still exposed to the wrath of God, I pray that they would see a picture here of the salvation that could be theirs, that wrath is coming for them.

[41 : 23] I pray that you would drive them into Jesus Christ to be saved. his name for his sake. Amen. Take your hymnals and turn to 705.

In this hymn, we sing of the grace of God and surely we see a picture of God's grace in Rahab's life and finding her out and loving her.

And verse 3 says, dark is the stain that we cannot hide. I imagine Rahab had a very dark stained heart and yet what can avail to wash it away?

Look, there's a flowing, a crimson tide, whiter than snow you may be today. 705. Let's stand as we sing.