

FOR HARLOTS AND OTHER SINNERS

Joshua 2

Biologists tell us that no two human beings are exactly alike. The human DNA structure is inexhaustible in possible combinations that make each one of us a unique creation of the Great, Perfect Creator. But having said that, there are two desires in the bosom of every person that are exactly the same. Whatever a man's faith may be, he longs for peace verses pain on the other side of the grave. And on this side of the grave, man longs to find true meaning for his life. Thriving, not just surviving. Achieving, not just existing.

Today we are going to examine the life of one who had little hope of attaining either desire. Rahab was her name, and prostitution was her game. Rahab had no hope of heaven and she was involved in the most immoral, destructive business in the world, a business that heaped more condemnation and guilt upon her soul every single day. But Rahab found grace the eyes of the Lord, and God delivered her from her sin and used her to do a great work for Him. And so Rahab's story is a story of great inspiration for harlots and other sinners. And that means every one of us. So let's read her story together.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Joshua 2. Now, before we get into our discussion of Rahab, I want us to consider Israel's challenge of claiming the Promised Land for a few moments.

After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, it was finally time for the Children of Israel to claim their inheritance. And so Joshua sent out two spies to scout out the potential obstacles in Canaan and bring back a report. But notice his instructions to them. Joshua said, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho". Jericho was perhaps the most fortified city in all of Canaan. It was

about six miles west of the Jordan, the first city that Israel would come to after it had crossed over from the wilderness.

Let me tell you a bit about this city. Jericho was built on a huge mound about 46 feet above ground level. I picture it to look somewhat like the mounds at Moundville, only Jericho was a lot bigger. It was six acres large. So building the Jericho mound was quite an earth moving project in those days, wasn't it? But the entire area of Jericho, including the slope between the city itself and the terrain below, was nine acres. Now, at the bottom of the slope there actually two walls, one on top of the other. The bottom wall was a retaining wall about 12-15 feet high, and the citizens of Jericho had built a wider mudbrick wall on top of that. This wall was 20 feet high or more, so the height of those two walls combined was app. 35 feet (Answers in Genesis/archaeology/the-wall-of-Jericho). But that was not the only obstacle that the invaders from Israel faced. At the top of the slope, surrounding the six acre plateau of the city was another 20 foot high wall. So Jericho actually had two walls protecting her, an essentially 35 foot wall at the bottom of the slope and a 20 foot wall at the top.

And what a lesson we can learn from Jericho! Jericho was the first city that Israel had to conquer if she was to claim the all of the blessings of Canaan that God had promised her. As long as Jericho stood she could never have peace. But to conquer Jericho would be almost humanly impossible. But what a picture Jericho is of the Christian life and of the Church's calling. God has called every child of His to live the abundant, victorious life in Christ, because this is the only life that brings glory and honor to Him. And God has called His church to rise up and storm the gates of hell and snatch precious souls for whom Christ died out of the burning. But we can be assured that when we get serious about these things there will always be a Jericho that we must conquer first! Satan will always rise up to discourage us and

cause us to give up the fight, and settle back down to a life of defeat and mediocrity. And that's the way that most believers live. Stuck in the wilderness, with Canaan just across the Jordan, but too fearful to cross over and claim the marvelous bounty that God has already promised them.

But beloved, that is not the way God has called us to live! The apostle Paul writes that we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Rom. 8: 37). And today our Joshua, our Lord Jesus Christ, is calling for us to follow Him into Canaan and conquer the strongholds of Satan for the advancement of His kingdom and the praise of His holy name. We will talk much more about this as we continue studying Joshua, but now let's turn our attention to Rahab.

The only mention of Rahab in the OT is here and in Joshua 6, so we know absolutely nothing about Rahab other than that she was a woman of ill repute, a harlot. But Rahab has much to teach us today. First of all and foremost, Rahab teaches us about the **grace of God**. Let's pick back up and continue reading from Joshua 2:2 (read through v. 13). The men and women of Jericho had heard of Israel long before they ever saw them. Rahab told the spies that they had heard how God had dried up the Red Sea for them and how they had already utterly destroyed the two kings of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan. And she said that when they heard it that their hearts melted. They were petrified.

Let me stop here just to remind all of us of a great truth. And that is, Satan is a defeated foe, and he knows it. We often talk about the devil being as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And that is certainly true, as Peter warns us (1 Peter 5:8). But what we fail to remember is that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Almighty lion tamer! He is the One Who cast Satan like lightning out of Heaven (Luke 10:18). And He is the One Who one day will cast the devil into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev.

19:20). And when any believer or any body of believers put on the armor of God and go out to war against him, just like the men of Jericho, the devil is petrified. And he will shoot every fiery dart that he possibly can to stop our advance. But when we lift up the shield of faith they are like a child's sparkler trying to penetrate a shield of the strongest steel.

But let's get back to Rahab. Rahab was a pagan. She worshipped and served pagan gods. But God had touched her heart and convinced her that her gods were no gods at all, that the one and only true God was the God of Israel. Look again at what she said to the spies in the last part of v. 11 (... "for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath"). Rahab had come to faith in the God of Israel! And according to Hebrews 11: 31 she was the only one in all of Jericho that came to faith. Why did the rest of the city not believe along with Rahab? They had the same evidence for belief that she had. No one knows, for God surely wanted them to believe in Him. God says in Ezekiel that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (33:11). So why did Rahab believe? Only one reason - the grace of God. Listen to what Paul writes in Ephesians 2: 4-5: "But God, who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you have been saved)".

Rahab was dead in her trespasses. She was just as dead spiritually as someone who is dead physically. There is nothing, absolutely nothing that will raise up a corpse but the power of Almighty God. You can slap them, scream at them, throw cold water in their face, but nothing you do will make them respond to you. And so it was with Rahab spiritually. She could no more reach up to God than could a corpse reach up to someone standing by their casket, and she was destined to perish in her sins. But when she heard about the God of Israel, the God of

Israel reached down and drew her to Himself and she was gloriously saved. We know that she was saved because James 2:25 tells us that Rahab **was justified** by her work of hiding the spies. And the writer of Hebrews says that this good work was a result of her faith. He says, "**By faith** Rahab the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe". But beloved, **it was all by God's grace**. The free, undeserved gift of God. The Bible says, "By grace you are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

But here is the take away for you and me. Nobody in all of Jericho was more wicked than Rahab. No one deserved to be judged any greater. But God looked down, saw her faith, and said, "I forgive you. I will spare you". Look at v. 14 again (read). And beloved, if God dealt kindly and truly with Rahab the harlot, He will surely deal in the same way with any prostitute or any other sinner who sincerely comes to Him! There is no telling how many people in this world want to be forgiven of their sins, but they have been deceived by Satan into believing that they've gone too far in their sin and they can't be forgiven.

But absolutely nothing could be further from the truth! Paul wrote to young Timothy, "This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them. But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst [of them], Christ Jesus might demonstrate His extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1: 15-16, HCSB). The very reason that God reached down and touched Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, just like He touched Rahab, was as an example to every poor sinner who comes to Him and cries out for mercy. And if you think that you've gone too far in your sin and that you are outside of the boundary of God's grace, then God

is saying to you today, “I forgave Rahab, and I forgave Paul, the worst of sinners, and I will certainly forgive you!”

But when we consider that God saved Rahab from physical and eternal death, we must see the means by which He did it. In v. 12 Rahab begged the spies to save her and her household, and then she said, “Give me a true token”. And what she meant was, give me a guarantee that you’ll do what you say”. And beginning in v. 17 they give it to her . The spies said, “If you will place this scarlet cord we’re giving you in your window, when we come back and take the city, you and all who are inside your house will be saved. But if anyone goes outside they will die.” And Rahab believed the spies and hung the scarlet cord out their window, and her hope of deliverance was in the cord and nothing else, not quitting her trade, not hiding the spies. And we read in Joshua 6 that the scarlet cord was that true token that saved her life and the lives of all of her family.

Does this not cause our minds to go back to 40 years before, when God’s children were still in bondage, and Moses was about to free them from Pharaoh’s tyranny? Plague after plague came upon Egypt, and Pharaoh’s heart only grew harder, and he would not let God’s people go. And finally God told Moses that He was sending one last plague upon Egypt, the death of all the first-born in the land, and then Pharaoh would let His people go. But God made a way that the first-born of Israel could be spared. He said to Moses, “Moses, tell my people to kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts of their houses, and tell them that I said, ‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you’” (Ex. 12:13). The blood of a lamb was Israel’s true token, and for all who applied it to their doorposts, not a single one of their firstborn died.

Now fast forward about 1450 years to the time of the prophet like Moses that God raised up, Jesus Christ, His only Son. The Jews of Jesus’ day were immersed in hypocritical, ritualistic

worship that God hated, and the Romans were immersed in idolatry and debauchery. And both groups were in the same dead and doomed spiritual condition as were the Egyptians and the people of Jericho. But not only were **they** dead in their sins, both groups represents every one of us. For speaking of Jews **and** Gentiles, Paul writes in the book of Romans, "...For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God", and, "For the wages of sin is death". And just like Rahab, every guilty heart all over the world cries out to God saying, "God, please show kindness to me despite my sin, and please, Lord, give me a true token. Give me a guarantee that you will be merciful to me."

And friends, that is exactly what God has done. But His true token for us is not a scarlet cord to hang out our window, nor is it lamb's blood to paint on our doorpost. It is a much, much more valuable sacrifice to God than that. It is the blood of His only unique Son, Jesus Christ. After Paul declared that all have sinned he went on to say, "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God has set forth as a propitiation **through faith in His blood**" (Rom. 3:24-25a).

Now, the word "propitiation" simply means a satisfaction. Our Lord Jesus Christ was the cleansing agent that eradicated our sin and guilt before God, and He did it through His own blood that He shed on the cross. Peter writes that it is precious blood, blood without spot and without blemish. And to all who will look to the blood of Calvary's cross and say, "Jesus, Your precious blood is enough! I need no other cleansing for my sin than your perfect, bloody sacrifice" – to all who will trust in Christ alone for forgiveness, God says, "I completely forgive you and accept you. You will not come into judgment, for you are mine!"

The world is rocking on its heels in the wake of the Ebola virus crisis. Few of us have ever seen such a deadly killer loosed

on defenseless humanity and spreading so rapidly. And people are getting scared, and with good reason, for according to some estimates about 7 in 10 people who contract Ebola will die. There is one treatment that a few people have received that the medical community hopes to be helpful, and that is a blood or a plasma transfusion from someone who has had the virus and has survived. Doctors believe that this blood contains antibodies that help to fight the Ebola virus and help the patient to recover. Dr. Kent Brantly received a unit of blood from a 14 year old survivor that he was treating in Liberia, and since then he's donated three times himself. But it is still uncertain just how much the transfusions help. One doctor said they could be very effective, another said that it was critical to get the transfusion early. But nobody really knows for certain how effective they really are. But what if someone beat the Ebola virus and their blood proved to be a 100% cure for anyone who had the disease, no matter what stage they were in? What value could you place on that person's blood?

Friends, what the world does not know but so desperately needs to know is that it is infected with the disease we spoke of a few moments ago, the disease of sin, which is much more deadly than Ebola. The mortality rate is 100%. But praise God, the cure rate is 100%! And it works 100% of the time. It is the holy, perfect blood of Jesus. Let me share a verse with you that tells us just how valuable, how precious, this blood of Jesus really is. Listen to Acts 20:28, where Paul addressed the elders at the church of Ephesus. Paul says to them, "Therefore take heed to yourselves.....to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood". Think of that! God purchased His church with His own blood, for Jesus was God in human flesh. And beloved, if you can't trust in the blood of God to cover your sins, then tell me, what greater hope to you cling to? Your own

goodness? I don't know about you, but I choose to trust the blood of the God Who loved me and gave Himself for me!

So the first thing that God teaches from Rahab is that His grace is available to every sinner, no matter how great their sin, if they will but come to Him on the merits of Jesus' blood and plead for forgiveness. But I want us to learn two more things from Rahab before we close. And one of them is the concern that she had for her family. Rahab was not just concerned she be delivered from death, but she also pleaded with you out of the darkness of eternal death into the light of eternal life, the most loving thing in the world is to try to bring a loved one out of darkness with you. And that's what Rahab did. And that is what we who are saved should do. Yes, it may be awkward. And yes, you might get rejected. But let me ask you something. What's worse, your loved one rejecting you, or God rejecting them, with them spending eternity in hell as a result?

But some of you may not have any close relatives who are unsaved. Many Christians don't. Does that let you off of the hook? NO! In fact, Rahab was not limited to just her family when she set out with her warnings. The spies told her that **whoever** was in her house would be spared the judgment of God. And so she could have crammed her family and friends into her house like sardines if she wanted to, and they all would have been saved. And beloved, we who belong to Jesus know that judgment is coming for every lost sinner, either at death or when He comes again. And whatever you do in your church, your highest calling is to get outside of your church into a world where your family and friends and neighbors are perishing and compel them to come to Jesus.

A second truth. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done, when Jesus changes your life, He will use you to do great things for Him. If your turn to Matthew 1 and read the genealogy

of our Lord, you will find the name of King David, the greatest king of Israel. But further down you read the name of David's great, great grandmother, Rahab!