



Rahab the Prostitute

Part 1 – Faith in Unlikely Circumstances

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It is an awesome blessing to be able to worship together with God's people this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we are especially happy to have you with us, and we hope that you are encouraged by your visit. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card – either online or on a card from the pew in front of you. And we also invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns in that way. In terms of our schedule, please remember that Gary Mueller is planning another Pontoon Fellowship today at 2 o'clock over on the other side of Lake Mendota. If you are interested or have any questions about that, please see Gary right away.

We are here this morning to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. We were created in the image of God, but sin has separated us from God. In response, God sent his Son to save us, to restore the relationship. He died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. This is the good news, and we obey this good news by hearing and believing the message, by turning away from sin, by publicly confessing our belief to the world that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and then we cry out to God for salvation through baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And this morning we are sharing some good news from the Clarke County Church of Christ down in Athens, Georgia. They say that, "Antonio was baptized about a year ago. Friday afternoon, he baptized his fiancé, Cara, into the body of Christ! Praise the LORD! That makes three baptisms this week." And then they quote Acts 22:16, where Ananias challenges Saul to make a decision, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name."

This update comes to us from the Lord's church down in Millington, Tennessee, just north of Memphis. They say, "We had a baptism yesterday! What a great way to start the week! Welcome to the family Treveon Whitson!! Angels are rejoicing in heaven and so are we!!"

And this last one comes to us from my friend Paul Delgado who preaches at the Westside congregation down in Elgin, Illinois (a northwest suburb of Chicago). He posted a few days ago, and he says, "Today, we welcomed our new sister, Juanita, to the family of Christ!" So good to see it, and we share this to try to show what it means to obey the gospel. If we can help in any way, please get in touch using the contact information on the wall up here, or you can send a text or give me a call at 608-224-0274.

All of us here this morning have the power to influence other people. Influence can be defined as “the capacity or power to be a compelling force on the actions, behavior, or opinions of others.” And when we think about it, even the smallest human beings have the ability to be a powerful influence. Even those not yet born have a way of influencing behavior. And then, once a child is born, those children continue to influence our behavior. I am amazed how the scream of a 7-pound baby at 3 o’clock in the morning is able to awaken and move a full-grown human being! That child is truly “a compelling force on the actions of others.” And certainly all of us have the ability to influence others.

This morning, though, I’d like to ask: Is it possible to be influenced by someone who died long before we were ever born? Is it possible, for example, to be influenced by a great-great grandparent? Some of us here this morning are blessed to have known our great-grandparents. I remember my mom’s grandparents. My great-grandmother was a faithful Christian and stayed faithful until she died, even though her husband (my great-grandfather) was not baptized until well into his 70’s. He went to church as a teenager, but somebody made fun of what he was wearing (his overalls), and he never went back until one of my uncles studied with him and he was baptized not long before he died. But how many of us have been influenced by our great-great grandparents?

On the wall up here we are looking at a picture of my great-great grandfather, Robert Elijah Exum. And he’s pictured at a silver mine he either owned or managed in Ouray, Colorado. I believe the calendar on the wall indicates that this was taken somewhere around the year 1900 (give or take a few years). My parents visited Ouray years ago, they dug into some records, and they discovered that Robert Elijah Exum served on the school board in 1899. I have been to Ouray several times through the years, I hope to return in a week or two to do some camping in the area, and part of it is due to this man. It’s a beautiful area. But Robert was a faithful Christian. My dad remembers hearing about Robert and his wife traveling many miles to worship by horse and buggy, using bricks warmed by the fire to keep them warm along the way. And even though we never met, I am highly confident that I have been influenced by my great-great grandfather – because, he influenced by great-grandfather, who influenced my grandfather, who influenced by father, who influenced me.

King David is one of the great heroes of faith in the history of God’s people. He was a man of great faith, a man after God’s own heart, one of the greatest kings in ancient Israel. And as we start looking at King David’s family tree, we find that a lot of his greatness can most likely be attributed to his great-great grandmother. I doubt that he knew her personally (although it might have been possible), and yet her influence on his life was tremendous.

We remember that Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and through the Sinai Desert for 40 years. We’ve been learning about this in our Wednesday evening studies. However, as we just learned this past Wednesday, due to his own disobedience, Moses was not allowed to lead the people into the Promised Land. Instead, Joshua takes over, and at the beginning of the book of Joshua, they assemble just east of the Jordan River, they are ready to take the land that God has given to them, but they must first conquer one of the oldest and most fortified cities anywhere in the ancient world, the city of Jericho.

This morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to the book of Joshua, and today (and next week) I’d like for us to focus on Joshua 2, where we are introduced to King David’s great-great grandmother. In the opening verses of Joshua 2, we find that Joshua sends two spies into the city. And that’s interesting, because Joshua himself was one of the two spies who brought back a good report 40 years earlier. If you remember, Moses sent twelve spies, one from each of the twelve tribes, and ten of those men came back saying, “There’s no way we can do this! The people are huge, and their cities are fortified! We are like grasshoppers in their sight!” Joshua and Caleb, though, came back saying, “The land is plentiful, and God is with us, so let’s do it!”

The ten spies, though, disheartened the people, and God caused the entire nation to wander for forty years, until that generation died off in the wilderness. So here we are, forty years later, ready to cross over the Jordan, and Joshua sends spies, not twelve, but two! And I would love to talk with Joshua about this some day, but I think it's because he and Caleb proved forty years earlier that two spies are all we need!

Nevertheless, as they approach their own D-Day type invasion of the Promised Land, these two men apparently swim across the rain-swollen Jordan River, they make their way into the city of Jericho to scope out the city. I picture these two as Army Ranger types. I'm thinking of those bearded guys who rode into Afghanistan on horseback days after 9-11, and once they enter Jericho, they find themselves at the home of a prostitute by the name of Rahab, a woman who will eventually become the great-great grandmother of King David. This morning, then, let's take a look at all 24 verses of Joshua 2,

¹ Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. ² It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." ³ And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." ⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. ⁵ "It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." ⁶ But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. ⁷ So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.

⁸ Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, ⁹ and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. ¹⁰ "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 utterly destroyed. ¹¹ "When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. ¹² "Now therefore, please swear to me by the Lord, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, ¹³ and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." ¹⁴ So the men said to her, "Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the Lord gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. ¹⁶ She said to them, "Go to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way." ¹⁷ The men said to her, "We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, ¹⁸ unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father's household. ¹⁹ "It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house,

his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. ²⁰ *“But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear.”* ²¹ *She said, “According to your words, so be it.” So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.*

²² *They departed and came to the hill country, and remained there for three days until the pursuers returned. Now the pursuers had sought them all along the road, but had not found them.* ²³ *Then the two men returned and came down from the hill country and crossed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they related to him all that had happened to them.* ²⁴ *They said to Joshua, “Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us.”*

What an amazing account! And part of what makes it amazing is that we don't really celebrate this like we do some of the other amazing stories from back then. We sing with our kids about Daniel in the lion's den, for example. We sing about young David killing Goliath. We sing about Joshua and the battle of Jericho. But have we ever heard a song about Rahab the prostitute? If you'd like to write one, maybe we could sing it! But this is an amazing account! This morning, I'd like to focus in on the oddity of this, that Rahab is an unlikely source of faith. Next week, I'm hoping we can focus in on Rahab's journey of faith (the steps that she takes). I am hoping to head out of town for two weeks, but when I get back I'd like to have us look at a passage from Joshua 6 where we find Rahab's faith rewarded. Today, though, I want us to focus in on the fact that faith can sometimes be found in the most unlikely of circumstances.

And part of this is tied to the question: Why send spies to Jericho? After all, as we noted earlier, they already know that God is giving them the land, what is the benefit to sending spies? Well, I think we may find the answer in that passage Hans read for us earlier. In James 2, James referred to these two men not as *“spies,”* but as *“messengers.”* There's a difference between a *“spy”* and a *“messenger”*! What's that about? Well, in Deuteronomy 20:10, God's Law says that, *“When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace.”* Jericho was an evil city. On the wall up here, we're looking at a picture of an actual image of Baal. I took this picture a number of years ago on a visit to what is now known as the “Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures” at the University of Chicago. All of you need to go there, by the way – I have taken the bus to Chicago, where you can get on a city bus and then do some walking. The cafeteria down there looks like something straight out of Harry Potter. It's like the great hall from Harry Potter with a Subway and a Pizza Hut off to the side. But on one of my trips down there, I got to meet Baal. This is an actual idol of Baal that was worshiped during the time and in roughly the same place that we are talking about this morning. The residents of Jericho, then, worship idols. From history, we know that they practiced self-mutilation, they sacrificed their little children, they buried their dead under their floors. One source said that they would chop off the heads of their relatives, cover them in plaster, and worship those heads. They were an evil, idol-worshipping, child-sacrificing, pagan society. But into all of this, God sends *“messengers.”* Sometimes we talk about spies going undercover, but here we have messengers going undercover as spies, because I believe their real mission was to bring a message of salvation. I'm thinking of that time in John 4 where Jesus *“had to go through Samaria.”* That's weird. Normally, Jews didn't pass through Samaria. Usually, they took the long way around, but Jesus *“had to pass through Samaria”* so that he could meet up with the woman at the well. Apparently, Jesus knew that there would be a woman at that well who needed to hear the message of salvation, so he had to go there. So also, I believe, these two *“messengers”* (posing as spies) swam across the Jordan and made their way to Jericho to connect with Rahab the prostitute.

So, here we are, and for the time we have left today, I'd like to have us think about some of those reasons why Rahab is such an unlikely story of faith.

1. And to start, I would just go back to the fact that RAHAB IS A PAGAN, A CANAANITE.

She is definitely not an Israelite. She is completely outside the covenant God had established with his people. This woman has absolutely no spiritual advantage whatsoever. As far as we know, she has no scripture, no one to teach her the word of God. And, as we just noted, this woman lives in a completely vile and wicked city. I think we can make the case, in fact, that this woman and her people were among the worst of the worst. Back in Genesis 15:16, God predicted the time when Abraham's descendants would come to the Promised Land, but not before ***"the sin of the Amorites had reached it's full measure."*** In other words, God would have sent them sooner, but the Canaanites weren't quite bad enough to be completely exterminated. Well, now they are. Now they finally deserve it, and they are just a few days away from it. In fact, when Moses repeats the Law right before the people cross over, he gives a special warning from God in Deuteronomy 18:9-12, where Moses says,

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you.

In other words, don't do what the Canaanites are doing, and this is what they are doing: They are burning their children alive, they are practicing divination and witchcraft, they are casting spells, they are communicating with the dead, and so on. Don't do those things! And putting two and two together, Rahab was doing these things. These are her people, at least. This is her culture. And it got to the point where there were no innocent victims here. The Canaanites are evil people. We have some literature and even some graffiti and artwork from the time, and we've found what we would describe today as slasher porn, artwork depicting bestiality and necrophilia, even child sacrifice, and so on. We have jars containing the remains of little children, even babies, sacrificed to Baal.

But here's an interesting twist: You know how Joshua sends out the spies from Shittim? We need to be careful how we say that, by the way. Some translations refer to it as being the Acacia Grove (that's probably safer). But it's this exact same place we'll be looking at in our Wednesday class in a week or two. If we go back to Numbers 25, just a short time before this, Moses says, ***"While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel."*** Woah! In this same place, God's own people had just finished doing what God is about ready to completely destroy the Canaanites for doing! The Israelites are prostituting themselves with the Moabites on the east side of the Jordan River and worshiping their gods, just moments before God sends messengers across the river to deliver a message of salvation to an evil people who were doing exactly what his own people were doing. I don't know, but that's amazing to me. We may think that Rahab is such an unlikely candidate for faith, but God's own people have some issues of their own.

So also today, it's easy for to think that this guy over here may not be a good candidate for salvation (after all, he's evil – he's got the gay pride sticker on his Prius, she's got the pro-choice no matter what sign out in her front yard), but here we are, and we've got some issues of our own, don't we? Even so, Rahab is an unlikely story of faith. She's a pagan Canaanite.

2. Secondly, though, let's also note that Rahab is a WOMAN.

And I only point this out because women were often devalued in that culture – often abused or mistreated, and this abuse would often lead to poverty and prostitution (we will get to that in a moment). Some have assumed that Rahab might have been a widow, and that would have left her even more vulnerable than before. She lived in a time and culture where women were often victimized and brutalized. So, going into this, let's realize that we could just as easily be dealing with a man who comes to faith in this passage, but Rahab is a woman. And the fact that Rahab is included here I think serves as a reminder to all women from that point forward that all women are just as important to God as men are. And that would have been a revolutionary thought, especially in that time and place. So, Rahab is a woman.

3. And this leads us to the truth that Rahab is also a PROSTITUTE.

So here we learn: Not only was this woman surrounded by a pagan society, but she was part of it! She was selling herself, selling pleasure, and in the process, destroying families, breaking hearts, ruining lives, spreading disease, all while offending God in the process. And I don't know if most of us can ever truly understand the horror of a lifestyle like this. Prostitution has been somewhat glamorized in our media today. Maybe we aren't shocked by it, as much as we should be. Transactions are made, "I'll do this for this much, or I'll do this for this much," and so on. Think of the desperation that would lead to this. Think of the impact this would have on a person's soul. Over in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul warns about Christians joining themselves to prostitutes, and he says, ***"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.'"*** And in that context, Paul then goes on to say, ***"Flee from sexual immorality!"*** Run in the other direction! And the reason is: Sexual intimacy is at the core of who we are. And that's why something like prostitution is so damaging. And if it's damaging to those who may join themselves to a prostitute, imagine how damaging it must be for the prostitute – one encounter after another, day after day, month after month, year after year.

And I know Rahab is a Gentile, but we get a sense of what God thinks about prostitution over in Deuteronomy 23:17-18 where we find that prostitution was expressly forbidden under the Law of Moses. In fact, we find that a prostitute's offering was to be rejected in the house of God. The law says, ***"None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God."*** So, if a prostitute brought an offering to the house of God, the Levites were to give it back! Can you imagine? Imagine somebody putting cash in the box back there, and we as a church take it out and give it back, "I'm sorry, but we cannot accept this. You are too evil in the sight of God for us to accept your offering." That's harsh, isn't it? But that gives us some idea of how God thinks of prostitution. And yet, Rahab is a prostitute, making her highly unlikely to ever come to faith in God.

We'll get back to this in future lessons, but the Bible doesn't hide this. Over and over again, the Bible identifies this woman as ***"Rahab the Prostitute,"*** as if it's a part of her name. Isn't that somewhat strange? We don't read about Abraham the Liar, or Moses the Murderer, or David the Adulterer, but we do read about Rahab the Prostitute – not just here in Joshua, but also in Hebrews and in James (the passage Hans read for us earlier) – she is ***"Rahab the Prostitute"*** or ***"Rahab the Harlot."***

4. Beyond this, I would also just briefly note that Rahab (in this chapter) also becomes a TRAITOR to her own people.

And in a sense, I know she does this as a way of identifying with God's people here, but in the eyes of her own people, Rahab is willing to turn on her own nation. Committing treason is not generally considered to be a redeeming quality, to give up your own people on the eve of an impending attack.

5. And then, connected to this, Rahab is also a LIAR.

We may touch on this next week, but for now, Rahab is a liar. I would just briefly point out, though, that I have been somewhat disillusioned by all that's been written on this through the years. Some of you know that I keep a folder for every chapter in the Bible, and I've been filing stuff away in these folders for probably 40 years now. And when I opened up my folder on Joshua 2, most of those articles were on the question: Did God approve of Rahab's lie? Now think about this: Here is this whole chapter dedicated to Rahab's faith and God's amazing grace through the whole process, and so many people want to write about the lies! I'm reminded of Jesus turning the water into wine in John 2. Years ago, when I opened that folder, everybody was writing about the wine – was there any alcohol in it, and if so, how could Jesus have done such a terrible thing, and so on. But John 2 is not about that! So also in Joshua 2! It's not about the lying.

But, if we are "honest" here, I don't think we can get around the fact that Rahab did lie. Some try to work around this, but she lied:

- The men came to me, but I didn't know where they were from. That's a lie
- The men left. That's a lie.
- I do not know where they went. That's a lie.
- And, if you're fast you might catch them. That, also, is a lie.

Again, we'll get back to this part of it next week, but for now, we find that Rahab, is, in fact, a liar, which we'll just add to this list of reasons why Rahab is an unlikely hero of faith.

6. And one more this morning, tied to all of these, is that Rahab (and everybody she knows) is DOOMED, they have already been MARKED FOR DEATH.

This may be "all of the above" rolled into one. Over in Deuteronomy 20, when God told his people to besiege the cities of Canaan, he says, *"...you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the Lord your God."* Rahab and her people were marked for death. Now, not everybody in Jericho might have understood this quite yet. Here they were in a fortified city and the Israelites are on the other side of a rain-swollen river with no way to get across, but every living thing in the city of Jericho had been marked for death. God had already passed the sentence, and it was just a matter of time (a very brief time) until they would all be dead. They may not have felt that they were in great danger, but they were.

So also, today, anyone who has ever sinned is really in the same situation that Rahab is in, *"For the wages of sin is death,"* Paul says (in Romans 6:23). Rahab (and everybody around her) were dead; they just didn't know it yet. God, though, sends messengers, and these messengers come with a message of life.

Conclusion:

And so we are reminded this morning that faith comes in some of the most unlikely of circumstances. No one is beyond the grace of God. And we may know people like Rahab right now. We may know people who fall in one or more of these categories. We may know people like the woman at the well (in John 4), like the Ethiopian Officer (in Acts 8), and like the Roman Centurion (in Acts 10). And so, the first thing I hope we learn from Rahab is that faith may be found where we least expect it.

Now, as we think about this, we need to be careful. It's very easy for us to say, "Rahab was such an unlikely person to experience the grace of God!" But let's remember: So am I. And so are you. In an account like we find here in Joshua 2, we are Rahab. We are the Canaanite. We are the sinners, traitors, and liars. We are the ones who have been marked for death.

And yes, we are living in a sinful world, but we are sinners. It's like traffic. If I call my wife and tell her I'm stuck in traffic, that may be true, but you know what's also true? I AM traffic! So also with sin. We are reminded of Paul who said (in 1 Timothy 1:15) that, ***"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."*** Or, we think of Zaccheus the tax collector, or the thief on the cross – every rescue from sin is amazing. All have sinned, and all have fallen short of the glory of God (according to Paul in Romans 3:23). If we are saved, it is ***"by grace...through faith,"*** as Paul says in Ephesians 2. Salvation is the ***"gift of God."***

So, we'll wrap it up with two very brief but practical applications this morning:

First of all, let's be very careful thinking that anybody may be beyond saving. Let's work hard at getting past first impressions. Here's a prostitute. She's been with hundreds if not thousands of men. We can hardly imagine the effect that must have on someone's soul. But this woman was not beyond the grace of God. So, if you know a Rahab in your life, share the good news. Take the time to share the love, and redemption, and forgiveness, and grace of God. Let's be very careful thinking that anybody may be beyond saving.

But secondly, if we think that we personally have done something that God cannot forgive, if we think that we personally are not deserving of salvation, Rahab reminds us that this is not how that works. Rahab may be an example of faith in the most unlikely of circumstances, but that's grace. Ultimately, her past did not prevent her from being saved. And our past shouldn't stop us, if we are willing to respond with faith as she did.

And that's where we hope to go next week, if the Lord wills. Next week, let's look at this passage again, and let's focus in on the steps this woman takes in her journey of faith. I hope you can be with us next week as we continue our study of this woman who had so much influence on her great-great grandson, King David.

For now, let's close our study by going to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the God of gods and the great King above all other kings, and we come to you this morning to thank you for doing what you've done to save us from eternal destruction. We are in no way deserving of this amazing gift. Like Rahab, we are not worthy, at all. We have sinned in the past, and all of us continue to struggle. We ask for your grace and mercy as we do what we can to live by faith in the shadow of this amazing woman.

We love you, Father, and we come to you this morning in Jesus' name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com