

Genealogy

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1 ESV)

Rahab

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Joshua 2:1-21

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Introduction:

Good morning! We are now in week 2 of our celebration of the incarnation. The word *incarnation* simply means “in flesh.” The incarnation is the glorious doctrine of how the God of the universe became a man. Think about that for a moment: Before Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, he ETERNALLY EXISTED as God!

In a display of mercy and humility and glory that we will never fully fathom, the eternal God Himself came down and assumed our frailty and weakness. He did this to identify with us. He did this to redeem us. He lived with us, so that he could die for us, so that he could SAVE US! That’s what Christmas is all about! It is the celebration of a deep and beautiful mystery – God with us, Emmanuel.

As we celebrate this Christmas, we are working our way through the genealogy in Matthew. Last week, as we considered the inclusion of Tamar on this list, we were reminded that – rather than entering into an innocent, commendable family tree – Jesus chose to enter into the story of a sinful, dysfunctional, HORRIFYING family tree! We were reminded that that’s what our God does: He enters into the mess *so as to bring us out* into glory! That was worth seeing, wasn’t it?

This morning, we’re going to continue to work our way through this genealogy. Listen with me now as I read up to verse 5:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the

father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by **Rahab** (Matthew 1:1-5a ESV)

As I mentioned last week, the PRIMARY purpose of this genealogy is to demonstrate that Jesus is the legitimate descendant of David – he is the long-awaited Messiah king. However, while that is Matthew’s *primary* purpose, it isn’t his *only* purpose. If it was, he wouldn’t bother including any women in this list. A genealogy was traced through the males of the family, but Matthew chose to mention five women – five curious footnotes in his account of the Christmas story.

This morning, we are going to turn our attention to the second woman in this list: Rahab.

We find the story of Rahab in Joshua 2. Turn with me there in your Bibles now. As you find your place, I want to take a moment to set the scene for the text we’re about to read. At this stage in the story, the Israelites have just spent forty years wandering in the wilderness. God delivered them from their slavery in Egypt, He parted the waters of the red sea, and He gave them victories over their enemies, but they *still* struggled with unbelief. Fear dies hard.

When God finally brought them to the cusp of the Promised Land, they refused to cross over. They succumbed to their faithlessness and, as a result, that generation was sentenced to die in the wilderness.

But now, under new leadership, having served their sentence in the wilderness, the next generation of Israelites – those who were *children* when mom and dad refused enter – are ready to enter. They are ready to flood into Canaan and to take possession of the promised land. The first city that stands in their way is the well-fortified city of Jericho – the home of Rahab. Look with me now to Joshua chapter 2. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. ² And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” ³ Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who 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, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. ⁵ And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, 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 hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. ⁷ So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

⁸ Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof⁹ and said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt 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 devoted to destruction. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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 sign¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ And the men said to her, “Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.”

¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. ¹⁶ And she said to them, “Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.” ¹⁷ The men said to her, “We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear.¹⁸ Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. ¹⁹ Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. ²⁰ But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.” ²¹ And she said, “According to your words, so be it.” Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window. (Joshua 2:1-21 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As we consider the story of Rahab and ponder why Matthew might have chosen to include her, it is worth noting that he is not the only New Testament author to point back to Joshua 2. There was something about Rahab – something about this story – that the Apostles identified as a powerful illustration. The author to the Hebrews even chose to include her in the great hall of faith! In Hebrews 11:31, we read:

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 ESV)

It is always a gift when the New Testament authors interpret the Old Testament for us and here, in Hebrews 11, we're taught that the story of Rahab ought to be read as a story of *faith*. If we are going to see what we are *meant* to see, then we will need to read this story as the Apostles read it.

Rahab: A Story of Faith

So, what does this story teach us about faith? First, it teaches us that:

1. Faith comes by hearing

Look again at verse 9. Rahab confronts the spies and tells them:

I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt 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 devoted to destruction.¹¹ **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 2:9b-11 ESV)

“For we have heard.” Do you see that in the text?

Here is a woman, living in a pagan city, having spent her whole life worshiping pagan gods, who has never given a thought to the God of Israel. Why would she? How could she? She had never heard of him!

But suddenly, all that has changed! Word had spread in Jericho about the God who parted the Red Sea. Word had spread about the nation that had conquered Sihon and Og. Word had spread that this army – led by God Himself – was marching toward their city.

People were talking. Rumors were spreading. The great, redemptive works of God were being discussed in the city of Jericho, and HEARING, Rahab BELIEVED!

Faith comes by hearing. As the Apostle Paul declares in Romans 10:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? **And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?** And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Romans 10:14-15 ESV)

How will they believe – how will they have faith – if they have not heard? Oh, that we would be faithful to stir up rumbling and stories in this city about the redemptive works of God! Oh, that the prostitutes in the outskirts of the city would hear rumors about the God who has the power to transform lives and to bring freedom!

But before we can go any further, we are also reminded in these verses of the sad reality that not everyone who hears believes. The entire city had heard the news. Everyone was discussing it. But only Rahab responding to what she heard with faith. As John Calvin observes here:

We see, then, how in a case where all received the same intelligence, she, in the application of it, went far beyond her countrymen.¹

For the rest of the city, this news led them to believe that they needed to be on high alert – that they needed to bolster their defenses and keep watch in the night. This news suggested that the approaching army was an army to be feared, because it threatened the life that they had known.

But Rahab, hearing the same report as her countrymen, recognized the truth behind the evidence. Hearing, she declared in faith:

the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. (Joshua 2:11b ESV)

This wasn't a time for bolstering defenses – this was a time for getting right with the living God! The Red Sea has never parted before and it will never part again! This band of slaves – with the armies of Pharaoh and Sihon and Og lying in ruins in their wake – is not simply an army to be feared! They are being led by the God of heaven and earth! He is the One who is at work! He has

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 10065.

to be! He is the One who is about to wage war with Jericho! Nothing else could explain this evidence!

Her countrymen heard, but they couldn't see the truth. Rahab heard, and she lived! Faith enables us to hear what we need to hear and to see what we need to see. Charles Spurgeon famously said:

The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. And the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins.²

One son walks with the Lord and the other rejects the faith. One visitor falls on their knees in repentance and the other drives away angrily. One neighbor repents and believes and the other stops sending Christmas cards. The same gospel – the same evidence – yet one heart is melted and the other is hardened.

We can't control the results. We don't know who will respond like Rahab. But we must keep preaching. Because faith comes by hearing. Second, we learn here that:

2. Faith takes a side

When the Israelite spies hid themselves in the house of Rahab the prostitute, they put their lives in her hand. From a plain reading of the text, it is unlikely that the spies were visiting Rahab for sinful reasons – it is far more likely that they were looking for an inconspicuous place to spend the night. The house of a prostitute was the kind of place where secrecy was likely to be valued.

Unfortunately, someone must have witnessed their entrance because the King caught wind of the spies in Rahab's house. He sent his soldiers to investigate, at which point, Rahab had a choice to make.

If she was discovered to be harbouring spies, she would share with them in the death sentence. The ancient law code of Hammarubi, for example, says:

² Charles Spurgeon, as cited on <https://puritanquoter.wordpress.com/2010/11/12/the-same-sun-which-melts-wax-hardens-clay/>. Accessed, Nov. 30, 2021.

“If felons are banded together in an ale-wife’s [prostitute’s or innkeeper’s] house and she has not haled [them] to the palace, the ale-wife shall be put to death.”³

Confronted with a life and death decision at a moment’s notice, Rahab counted the cost and chose to side with the spies. In this way, Rahab serves as a compelling example of faith.

In siding with the Israelites, not only was Rahab risking her life, but she was also leaving behind the life that she knew. Rahab would have to leave behind the city that she grew up in – the life that she had grown accustomed to – the way that she made her living. All of it was on the line when the soldiers came to her door. But, after counting the cost, Rahab chose to pay the price. Why is that?

Because Rahab’s eyes had been opened to see the God of heaven and earth! She understood in that moment that what she needed was to be on whatever side HE was on! Faith had directed her fear heavenward.

If God had promised this land to Israel, then He would give it to them. There were no walls, or armies, or circumstances that would stand in His way. Thus, Rahab deceived the soldiers at her door and chose to side instead with the men who were hiding on her roof, because those men were on the side of God.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:10 ESV)

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God! Rahab saw this, and she acted. She surrendered her former life for the sake of the spies, and then she turned to them and said:

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 sign¹³ 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 ESV)

These men could have stayed anywhere, but they wound up at Rahab’s house. For a reason that was beyond Rahab’s understanding, a door had been opened to her for a new life.

And she seized the opportunity.

³ As cited by Donald H. Madvig, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Deuteronomy – 2 Samuel)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 3, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 260.

“Swear to me! Swear to me that you will do for me what I did for you! Swear to me that my family will be spared when God gives you victory over this city!” There is a boldness and a desperation in this scene.

That’s what real faith does. Real faith ACTS! It RESPONDS! It PARTS WAYS with the world and it TAKES A SIDE!

When, with the eyes of faith we see our desperate situation and we see a way of escape, we lay hold and we cling for all that we’re worth. Just like the woman who had suffered from bleeding for her whole life who grabbed hold Jesus’ cloak, we lay hold of Jesus and we believe!

That’s a very big part of what we’re going to be doing this morning as we participate in communion. By eating the bread and drinking the cup, we are LAYING CLAIM to the forgiveness that Jesus purchased. We are visibly taking a side. We are saying with our actions, “Not only do I believe that Jesus died for sin – I believe that he died for MY sin! His death was MY death! His life is MY life!” The Lord’s Supper is a tangible display of faith.

Finally, this story teaches us that:

3. Faith follows through

The spies tell Rahab in verse 18:

Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. (Joshua 2:18 ESV)

And she responds in verse 21:

“According to your words, so be it.” Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window. (Joshua 2:21 ESV)

There was nothing magic about that scarlet cord. There was nothing magic about Rahab’s house. As is often the case in God’s plan, the way of escape seems borderline ridiculous.

Like when the Israelites painted their doorposts with blood before the Passover.

Like when the Israelites marched around a wall seven times and blew their trumpets.

Like when Jesus died on a Roman cross with a crown of thorns on his head.

God loves to bring about VICTORY in the unlikeliest of places. He calls us to trust Him in plans of salvation that make no earthly sense – plans that look like foolishness to the world.

But even as the world mocks and laughs, faith trusts God's plan. And faith follows through.

In faith, Rahab hung a scarlet cord out her window and gathered all of her loved ones into her house. As the Israelites shouted, the walls of Jericho began to shake uncontrollably. You can almost picture Rahab and her family huddled up and whimpering in fear. Will this scarlet cord make any difference in the midst of a siege? Will God really show mercy to a lying, foreign prostitute and her family?

And then, with a deafening crash, the walls of Jericho fell down. Except, that is, for the portion of the wall where Rahab's house was positioned. Miraculously, one sliver of the wall remained standing – and a scarlet cord dangled from the window. In Joshua 6:24-25 we read:

And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.²⁵ **But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day,** because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. (Joshua 6:24-25 ESV)

And so it happened that a prostitute from Jericho became a member of the family of God. This is Rahab, and Matthew has included her in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. So, as we did last week, I want to conclude our time this morning by asking the question: What are we meant to see here?

What Are We Meant To See Here?

While it's impossible for us to crawl into Matthew's brain and to declare with certainty what he intended for us to see, there are two elements in this story that strike me as the most likely reasons

for Rahab's inclusion. First, I think Matthew has included her in this genealogy because she presents us with:

1. An illustration of saving faith

Every other time that Rahab is mentioned in the New Testament it is because her display of faith was so commendable as to serve as an example for us to follow. I already mentioned that she was listed in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11. She is also referenced in the book of James. James points to Rahab as an example of how faith must be evidenced by works if it is to have any saving power. He writes:

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.²⁵ 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? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (James 2:24-26 ESV)

James is teaching us here that faith that saves is ACTIVE! If you confess with your mouth that your house is on fire while you continue to watch t.v. on your sofa, the evidence suggests that you don't actually *believe* that there is a fire. Belief and action – faith and works – go hand in hand. The famous evangelist Billy Graham once said:

Faith that saves has one distinguishing quality; saving faith is a faith that produces obedience, it is a faith that brings about a way of life.⁴

Rahab's faith was a saving faith. It prompted action! She hid the spies. She looked them in the eyes, and she bartered a deal. She hung the cord from her window, and she gathered her family into the house. Her faith was more than lip service. Her fear of the Lord moved her to ACTION!

My heart breaks when I watch as men and women allow gospel opportunities to pass them by. I see someone in the congregation, and I watch them as tears well up in their eyes as God brings conviction and as He exposes sin. And so, I share the gospel, and I explain that God has made a way of escape! I point to Jesus, and I plead with sinners to trust in him and live!

⁴ Billy Graham as quoted by John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 4151.

My heart breaks when all too often, I watch as the tears dissipate, and a settled resistance takes over. They walk out of here, still bearing the weight of their sins on their shoulders – still guilty and condemned – in spite of the fact that forgiveness and freedom and LIFE is RIGHT HERE for the taking!

Only ONE family in Jericho was spared from the wrath of God! Only ONE family in Jericho inherited a new life! Only ONE person in Jericho responded to the coming judgement with faith! Rahab seized the opportunity!

Like Jacob, who wrestled with God and would not let Him go without a blessing. Like the disciples in Matthew 4, who dropped their nets and left the life that they knew behind to go and follow Jesus. Faith is not passive. It is active!

Some of you have been here for an awful long time, and you've sat under the preaching of the word for an awful long time, but to this point you've still not surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. Do you hear him calling you? John Owen describes it this way:

When he does speak, he speaks as never man spoke; he speaks with power, and one way or other will make your "hearts burn within you," as he did to the disciples.⁵

Have you felt that? And yet, though your heart BURNS within you – though you see the way of escape right in front of you – though you have tasted and seen that this world has nothing to offer you – you are still sitting back, waiting. Waiting for what? I'm asking you this morning. Waiting for what?

Are you dead in your sins? Did Jesus die to pay your debt? Is he the way and the truth and the life? Then what are you waiting for?! Confess your sins! Put your trust in Jesus! Be baptized! Respond! Act! Seize the opportunity before the walls come crumbling down!

I think that's why Matthew has included a reference to Rahab here at the start of his gospel. He won't permit us to marvel at the manger in sentimentality. The King has come, and he beckons us to respond with faith.

⁵ John Owen, Kelly M. Kapic, and Justin Taylor eds., *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 126.

And lastly, Matthew has included this curious footnote because the life of Rahab is:

2. A display of amazing grace

As one commentator observes:

The story of Rahab confirms God's welcome to all people, whatever their condition. Christ died for all the world and the opportunity is available for all to come to him through faith, even the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).⁶

She was a prostitute. An adulterer by trade. Under Levitical law, she was worthy of the death sentence.

She was a foreigner. She had no claim to the promises of God. She wasn't a descendant of Abraham.

She was just a random woman living in a random city that was destined for destruction.

She knew something was wrong – she heard the rumblings, and she saw the concern on everyone's faces – but she didn't have a solution. Her spirit was restless, but she didn't know how to fix it. She didn't know where to start. She didn't see a way out.

But then, two men showed up at her door. They could have turned up anywhere, but they came to HER house. That one fateful night changed EVERYTHING! Rahab was no longer a prostitute. Rahab was no longer doomed to destruction. Rahab's family was given a future and a hope! They were assimilated into the chosen people of God. She was even chosen to be a part of the family tree that would lead to the Messiah!

Why?

Because that's what God does.

⁶ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 89.

NOTHING happens by chance! You are here this morning because God brought you here. You have been exposed to the gospel because God wanted you to hear it. We too often dismiss as coincidence what is actually the providence of God.

GOD sent those spies to Rahab's door. Up until that point, she had been known as Rahab the prostitute, but God had something better in store. He found her in her house tucked into the wall of Jerusalem selling her soul to make a living, and He opened her eyes, and He changed her story! Now, who do you find when you read the New Testament? Rahab the prostitute?

No, you find Rahab, the hero of faith!

Rahab, the example of good works!

Rahab, a link in the chain that led to Jesus Christ – the saviour of sinners!

This is what God does! This is amazing grace! And this is the word of the Lord. Let's pray together.