

AskMen.com, the largest men's lifestyle website in the world, recently surveyed over 2,000 men and asked them: "*Who do you consider your role model?*" The survey results were broken down into four major categories:

- 8 percent of men said they look to actors or entertainers as their role model.
- 24 percent of men try to emulate athletes.
- 31 percent of men said "I'm my own role model."
- 35 percent of men looked to entrepreneurs as role models.

In other words, according to AskMen.com, many men either admire themselves or men who, like Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg, "break the mold." Or men described as those "who see the risks and take them anyway, achieving success on *their own individual terms*."

The danger of launching into a sermon series... like the one we began two weeks ago... a series that presents such inspiring Bible Characters... is that we might settle for something far less... than what God intends for us. We might place a strong focus on the human character... the stirring actions and character of faith of the people in the narrative. There certainly are a large number of books and sermons that cover these stories... and would lead us to do so... because they are very inspirational.

Our passage of Scripture this morning presents one such person... who is even cited in what many believers call... "The Great Hall of Faith" – Hebrews... chapter 11. Hebrews 11 holds up several Bible characters... as wonderful examples of faith. They should be highly esteemed. They are GREAT examples. ... But not to the exclusion of missing Who the true Hero really is... in each of the events described in Scripture. We cannot

drop our focus on these great examples of human faith... and ignore the greater message. GOD is the hero of all these occasions.

So as we proceed in our study through the Old Testament books of Joshua and then Judges... and in your own personal study of the narratives that you perhaps first learned in Sunday School... let me encourage you to be careful to avoid the common temptation... of only admiring the human character... and not view (and learn more about) the True Hero... Who... in every one of these chronicled events... is the Lord... Adonai.

This morning... as we open the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Joshua... we are introduced to a woman... who first stands out as a very shady character. ... And yet... remarkably she makes her way into the New Testament's Great Hall of Faith – being mentioned in Hebrews 11:31. ... .. James 2:25... also holds a spotlight on her faith-produced actions. ... Furthermore... as the New Testament opens... you don't even get beyond 5 verses... before you see her name... among a list... primarily of MEN's names... in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5.)

Let's now read the account of this remarkable lady... allowing her to reflect... onto the greater glory of our True Hero.

### **Joshua 2:1-24**

Before we go any further... it is critical for a proper understanding of this chapter... that we notice how the author laid it out. This will give us insight as to what HE considers it's primary message. ... Joshua Chapter two has five sections.

Commission by Joshua, 1a  
Arrival and protection of the spies, 2-7  
Rahab's confession of faith, 8-14  
The conditional escape, 15-21  
Return to Joshua, 22-24

Now that we have this structure in front of us, I'd like for you to notice the major teaching of the chapter. ... Looking at the layout will help us to see that... primarily... the narrative emphasizes Rahab's confession of Yahweh's sovereignty.

I am looking at this structure like a sandwich... The first and fifth sections represent the slices of bread. ... The second and fourth sections can be likened to some pieces of lettuce... and the third... or middle section... is the meat. ... Obviously... the meat is the most important — and expensive — part of the sandwich. The lettuce is extra... and the bread is simply to keep the mayonnaise from getting all over your fingers. ... In this way... the writer seems to tell us that he thinks verses 8-14 are the most important part of his story.

*Common... pastor... not only is this weird... but it also sounds a bit contrived.... You might be thinking... "Just because that section is in the middle of things doesn't necessarily mean that is what the writer thinks is most crucial. What other evidence do you have...?" (Oh... and by the way... it is rather cruel to use a food illustration so close to lunch...)* ... Well... I apologize for my callousness... But... yes... there are other clues.

Notice how the writer creates suspense at the end of verse 7... He leaves his audience dangling. We all want to know... *'How in the world will those fellows get out of the city when the gates have been shut?'* ... If you are

hearing this story for the first time... not knowing how it turns out... and getting all wrapped up in the drama of it... there is a lot of anxiety being felt at the end of verse 7!

If it were on television... this is where they would cut to a commercial break... and the product-pushers will give you a message that *they* believe is far more important... because your attention level is at its highest. ... Here... we see the author create this tension... then divert us away... onto something else... when *our* attention is at its pinnacle... and he only comes back to it in verse 15. (That is when we finally get our literary Rolaid.) Meanwhile we have been given new information of vital importance. Tension is brought to a height... Rahab gives her confession of faith... and then we are given the resolution.

What we witness here is an effective literary “sandwich” device. It is as if he is telling you... the reader: 'Don't bother your head about how those two fellows will escape... there is something *far more important* that I want to tell you here.' ... The literary sandwich... is the writer's way of indicating... that what Rahab is about to say... is so important that all other matters must be placed on the back burner for now.

This... incidentally... tells us what the writer is *not* concerned about. ... He is not very interested in picky ethical questions rising up from verses 4-6... by which numerous commentaries give endless wrangling and discussions - “Was it right for Rahab to lie to the Jericho police?” ... and so on. ... It is tragic when people snag their pants on the nail of Rahab's lie. ... We might quibble endlessly about the matter... and never get around to hearing

Rahab's *truth* (vv. 8-13)... which the writer has conspired to make the center of the whole narrative.

That is like a wife who proudly opens the refrigerator door to show her husband the scrumptious salad and dessert she has prepared for their dinner guests; but her husband, scarcely glancing at those delicacies, instead rubs his finger across the top of the fridge and goes off muttering that 'there seems to be a good bit of dust on the top of the refrigerator'. He missed the whole point! He didn't understand his wife's intention at all. His focus was all wrong. However... the New Testament does not fall into this trap. It consistently stresses *the faith* of Rahab (spotlighting it in Heb. 11:31... and James 2:25).

We are going to digest the meat of our passage... but let me serve it with the bread and lettuce that comes with it... By that... I mean... please turn your attention with me... back to verse 1.

### **Joshua 2:1**

The nation Israel is camped at Shittim several miles from Jericho... across the Jordan River. Joshua needs information on Jericho's defensive readiness... so he sends two soldiers into the city as spies. They establish their base of operations in the house of a prostitute. ... Maybe they thought there could be no better place where they could keep their *anonymity* while gathering military intelligence. To stay in business... I'm sure Rahab had to keep her clientele anonymous.

But in thinking through this passage of Scripture... I believe that God directed the spies to Rahab's house... because God knew that her heart

was open to Him. Sovereign God knew that Rahab would be instrumental in the Israelite victory over Jericho.

God often uses people with simple faith to accomplish his great purposes... no matter what kind of past they have had... or how insignificant they seem to be. ... Rahab didn't allow her past to keep her from the new role God had for her.

Now... Joshua told the spies to focus their attention on Jericho. By conquering Jericho... Joshua knew they would be able to strike across the center of the country... and split the northern and southern armies of the Canaanites. The Canaanites would not be able to form alliances and join forces against the Israelites. ... This is actually brilliant military strategy! ... Once Joshua had divided the Canaanite armies... he could then turn against the weakest forces that lay in the south... (which they did)... and then turn and strike at the stronger forces in the north.

But Jericho was strategic not only because it could serve as a launch site for military campaigns... this was an ideal location to set up a home base for the families of the soldiers... and the other Israelites of the nation. The land around Jericho was actually a large fertile plain... that sat at the foot of a mountain range. ... It was well supplied with water by a number of strong springs... ideal for growing crops and providing food and water for the nation of three million plus Israelites. ... It was an oasis for a campsite that sat approximately five miles from the Jordan River.

Some criticize Joshua for sending spies. The critics say it was not an act of faith. And perhaps you may have thought: "*They should have been certain*

*of the promise without this extra encouragement...* ... True... Yahweh's word is adequate in itself. ... But let's be completely honest here. ... The problem is not that Yahweh's promises are not sure... The problem is that you and I... often need to feel sure of them. ... God's word should be sufficient to bolster us. ... But because of the weakness of our faith... sometimes God will graciously stoop down... and grant to us a number of signs... evidences... and providences... to make us feel assured of His already sure word. ... It is something like a husband who sends a card or note through the mail to his wife... telling her how much she means to him. ... She shouldn't need that... to know that he loves her... but it is an extra effort... that makes her feel loved and appreciated. So Yahweh understands our needs.

Some writers... from the time of Josephus to the present... have tried to soften the moral aspect of this story... by arguing that Rahab was only an inn keeper. The Hebrew word that is translated as "harlot" in Joshua chapter 2... can also mean... "one who keeps an inn..." "Proprietess of an inn..."

I might be inclined to go along with them... except for the fact that when Rahab is mentioned in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25... those writers use a Greek word that can only mean "prostitute." ... But... this in no way impugns the righteousness of God... Who used such a person in the fulfillment of His purposes. ... Instead this incident serves to spotlight His mercy and grace... with a powerful brightness.

Many who tell the story of Rahab and the spies... will try to justify Rahab's response to the King's men... when she lied to them. But let me say this:

You will waste your time trying to justify her lying. Rahab simply told a bold-face lie. Some say it was for a good cause, but we are not to do evil that good will come (Romans 3:8). We do not have to lie to help the cause of God. His power is not so weak that in a pinch we must lie to promote the truth. God rewarded Rahab for her faith not for her falsities. The reward does not condone her lying. Scripture does not condone evil just because it reports it in our human faith heroes.

Perhaps we're expecting too much from a new believer whose knowledge of God was adequate for salvation but certainly limited when it came to the practical things of life. ... If seasoned believers... like Abraham and Isaac resorted to deception (Gen. 12:10-20; 20; 26:6-11)... as well as David (1 Sam. 21:2)... we had better not be too hard on Rahab. ... This is not to excuse or encourage lying... but simply to take her circumstances into consideration lest we condemn her too severely.

Lying is wrong (verses like Prov. 12:22 make that clear)... and the fact that God had Rahab's lies recorded in Scripture... is no proof that He approved of them. ... The lie of Rahab was recorded... but not approved. The Bible approved her faith... Rahab's faith was conspicuous... and she demonstrated it by receiving the spies and risking her life to protect them. ... James saw her actions as the proof that she had a saving faith... and was truly a believer (James 2:25).

Stop and consider for a moment Rahab's faith-produced actions. ... Rahab risked her life... in order to save these two strangers. ... And this woman literally abandoned her former life. She made a courageous decision to



turn away from all of the evil and corruption of the Canaanites... so that she might become identified with the people of God.

You know what...? Scripture is clear... We must forsake sin and turn to God. ... There has to be repentance in our lives... a point when we turn away from the sins of this world and turn to God... Like Rahab... a turning that we now want to be identified... with the people of God.

OK... we have just taken in the bread and the lettuce... now it is time for the meat.

### **Joshua 2:8-9**

The first thing that we should notice is the name she used for the Lord... in verse nine. Rahab calls Him "the LORD," – or "Yahweh" in the Hebrew. ... "Yahweh" was the unique name that only the Israelites used for God. It was their covenant name that the Hebrew people held for their personal God. ... Canaanites did not have such a personal god... and certainly none that they would call by this name.

Rahab showed more faith in the Lord... than the ten spies had exhibited forty years before... when she said, "*I know that the Lord has given you the land*" (in verse 9). ... Her faith was based on facts... not just feelings... for she had heard of the miracles God had performed... starting with the opening up of the Red Sea at the Exodus.

### **Romans 10:17 (ESV)**

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

True saving faith isn't just a feat of intellectual gymnastics... by which we convince ourselves that something is true... that really isn't true. ...Nor is it

merely a stirring of the emotions... that gives us a false sense of confidence that God will do what we feel He will do. ... Nor is it a courageous act of the will... whereby we jump off the pinnacle of the temple and expect God to rescue us... True saving faith involves "the whole personality": the mind is instructed... the emotions are stirred... and the will then acts in obedience to God.

"By faith Noah, being warned by God of things not seen as yet [the intellect], moved with fear [the emotions], prepared an ark [the will]..."  
Rahab's experience was similar to that of Noah: *She knew* that Jehovah was the true God [the mind]; *she feared* for herself and her family when she heard about the great wonders He had performed [the emotions]; and *she received* the spies and pleaded for the salvation of her family [the will].  
Unless the whole personality is involved... it is not a saving faith as the Bible describes it.

Rahab *acted* upon what she knew! By faith she accepted the fact that God was real... His promises were real... and His power was real. ... She acted upon her faith in the Lord - and put her life on the line. She feared God more than men.

Rahab's faith was actually greater than many in Israel because:

- The Jews *saw* miracle after miracle.
- Rahab only *heard* about them and acted in faith on what she heard. How many times have we been challenged or blessed by the faith of another person or God's working in the lives of others?

Rahab was more faithful to the light she had been given and acted upon it. This is why she makes such an excellent example of faith... two times in the New Testament.

But stop and consider how she had been about as low as you can go on the totem poll. ... She was a Gentile... an Amorite... (they were corrupt people... vile... child killers)... and she had been a prostitute. ... She renounced her past... for the sake of her new faith. ... She deserted the only world she knew... the only way of life... her entire culture... and identified with God's people.

There is a phrase from the old sailing ship days... known as "*Nailing your colors to the mast.*" ... Your color was your flag that flew... from the mast of the ship. ... When the lookout in the crow's nest saw an enemy ship... he would often call to have the colors lowered... so that the enemy could not spot the flag right away... and blow the ship out of the water.... If it was their enemy. ... When you nailed your colors to the mast... you were in effect saying... "No matter what happens, this is who I am. I am committed. If an enemy ship approaching over the horizon wants to try to blow me out of the water... that is up to him. My colors are nailed to the mast." ... This is what God asks of us. ... He wants us to nail our colors to the mast by trusting Jesus Christ as our Savior... and standing up for Him in this wicked world. ... Have you nailed your colors to the mast?

### **Joshua 2:10-11**

The astounding miracle of the Red Sea parting had happened 40 years in the past... but it would be a hallmark of God working on behalf of Israel. The Red Sea miracle was to Israel – what the resurrection is to believers.

The military victories over Sihon and Og were amazing to the Canaanites. The strength of these two kings was very great, but Israel dispatched both of them. This caused much fear in the Canaanites.

Not only did the people of Jericho hear about these events... but they knew that they were true. ... .. However... Rahab seems to be the only one who turned to God.

There are a great many people today who know... as a historical fact that Jesus Christ died... was buried... and rose again... .. but they are not saved. ... They don't have a saving faith. What is a faith that saves...? It is belief in the historical facts... to the extent that it acts on that belief. ... In Rahab's case... she heard... she believed... and then she put her own life in jeopardy in order to protect enemy spies.

Verse 11 is quite a confession of faith from the lips of a woman whose life had been imprisoned in a very low status... of a pagan society. But... here is a pagan... a Canaanite prostitute... with an 'Israelite' confession on her lips. ... She holds to the utter supremacy of Yahweh.

She believed in *one God*, not in the multitude of gods that populated the heathen temples. She believed He was a *personal* God ("your God"), who would work on behalf of those who trusted Him. She believed He was *the God of Israel*, who would give the land to His people. This God whom she trusted... was not limited to one nation or one land... but was *the God of heaven and earth*. Rahab believed in a great and awesome God!

Rahab recognized something that many of the Israelites did not — and neither do many church attenders today - the God of heaven is not an

ordinary god! He is all powerful. The people of Jericho were afraid because they had heard the news of God's extraordinary power in defeating the armies across the Jordan River. Today we can worship this same powerful, miracle-working God. He is powerful enough to destroy mighty, wicked armies, as he did in Jericho. He is also powerful enough to save us from certain death, as he did with Rahab.

All of this leads Rahab to seek the mercy of Yahweh.

### **Joshua 2:12-13**

Here is more clear evidence of a strong faith. ... Genuine faith is never simply content... with being convinced of the reality of God. ... Instead it presses on to take refuge in God. ... Rahab not only must know the clear truth about God... but also must escape the coming wrath of God.

It isn't just a matter of correct belief... but of desperate need. ... Saving faith is always like this. It always runs to take refuge under His wings... Rahab not only trembles in terror before the Lord... but she also senses that there might be mercy in this fear-producing God. ... What else... besides the touch of Yahweh's hand... could possibly explain the creation of such faith... in the heart of this pagan harlot?

It would be very easy for us to assume that a person like Rahab... would NEVER be interested in God. But what do we find...? This Canaanite prostitute was willing to risk everything she had... for a God that she barely knew.

If we linger here... we might begin to feel a little convicted. ... How many times have we assumed a person's openness to the Gospel that we have to share... could not possibly exist... because of the person's background... their lifestyle... or their appearance...? Rahab stands to convict us... for allowing such things to be obstacles – to our telling them the Good News.

Rahab's urgent plea to take refuge with Yahweh... is met with an immediate and decisive response from the spies. They work out a plan for saving Rahab and her family. The spies are so determined... that they pledge their own lives that they will protect Rahab and her family.

Now... I am not going to comment on what so many like to point out... about the red chord that Rahab was to hang out her window. It was red... just like the red blood of the lamb that the Jews put over their door posts and were saved from the Angel of Death... on Passover night... It was red just like the red heifer... used in sacred Jewish sacrifices. It was red... just like the blood of Christ... which saves us today. ... Maybe there is some intriguing similarities in all of this.

But I think that it is important to note that Rahab and her family were saved by faith in the God of Israel... and not by faith in the rope hanging out the window. ... The fact that she hung the rope from the window was proof that she had faith... just as the blood of the slain lamb... put on the door posts in Egypt... proved that the Jews believed God's Word. ... Faith in the living God means salvation. ... But faith in *the token of the covenant*... is religious rig-a-mor-roll that cannot give us salvation... or assurance. The Jews depended on circumcision to save them... but they ignored the true

spiritual meaning of that important rite. ... Many people today depend for their salvation... on their baptism... or their participation at the Lord's Table (in Communion)... but this kind of faith is vain. ... Rahab had faith in the Lord... and in the agreement she had made through these two spies... who were God's servants. ... She proved her faith by hanging the scarlet rope from the window.

Please skip down to verses 23-24...

### **Joshua 2:23-24**

We can do it! The victory is ours! This was the attitude of the spies. Think for a second. These guys were almost captured; they had to hide in the mountains for three days, yet, they are excited. They do not focus on what was bad about their trip, they were focused on what God was going to do. What a difference from forty years ago.

God chooses to work through very ordinary and very unlikely people. He chose to work through Rahab, a Canaanite, a woman, a dishonest prostitute, a non-entity. ... God continues to work that way... as He always has. ... The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29...

#### **1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (ESV)**

*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

God loves to turn things upside-down... to change impossible situations... such as our own bias of who will accept Him and be used by Him.

If you have a strong sense of your own foolishness... and weakness... and baseness... if you feel despised... like a non-entity... like one of those "things that are not," remember Rahab. ... God knew who she was and God chose her. ... She responded in faith... and God exalted her. ... She became like a diamond... set against the darkness of her time. ... God loves to take unlikely people and do amazing things with them. ... And if you feel disadvantaged... a victim of prejudice... because of race... gender... age... or physical disabilities... God knows you. ... God will take your life and do something tremendous with it.

Part of the story we have seen is the wonderful way that God gradually changed Rahab... lifted her up... and gave her a place of honor in the history of his people. ... That is the process of sanctification for all of us. She was placed into a new... right relationship... with God and with his people... because of the Grace and Mercy of God. ... She could function as a healthy... whole person. ... She was declared righteous.

If you don't know that yet... there is no reason you can't know it. ... You can make the same confession of faith... and start the same process that Rahab entered into.

Or maybe you believe you are forgiven... and are a part of the redeemed community... but... you live with regret... overwhelmed with guilt about your past. ... Let the life and transformation of Rahab encourage and strengthen you. ... God loves to turn bad things around and conform people to his own image.