

## The Book of Jesus | Crossing Into the Land of Promise

### The House of Rahab

Joshua 2.1-21

9.16.18

*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. <sup>2</sup> It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." <sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> "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." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> "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. <sup>12</sup> "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, <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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." <sup>17</sup> The men said to her, "We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> "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. <sup>20</sup> "But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear." <sup>21</sup> 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.*

Last week we began a series on the Book of Joshua... It's the sixth book of the Bible and it's the history of The Conquest...the homecoming/settlement of God's people following that long detour, wandering in the desert 40 years after they refused to believe God.

At this early phase they have NOT yet crossed the Jordan to enter the Land...just a couple of scouts have been sent by Joshua to gather evidence. (Num 13.20)

Today, we meet the first Canaanite...the people who lived in the Land that God promised to give to Abraham's people... This Canaanite woman lived in the Jordan Valley in a city called Jericho. She is, at this point in the story, she's excluded; she's an outsider in more ways than one but that will change.

We will witness this woman's transformation in a very engaging story (as I said last week – if you grew up in Sunday School you remember this story!). She will escape being a casualty of war... She will find refuge in God and His people... She will begin a new life and HER HOUSE will not only BECOME a harbor where doomed people find safety...but the House of Rahab will ever be a kind of emblem, a symbol of sanctuary...a refuge where the excluded find shelter.

The early Christian Church saw this excluded woman as a kind of prophetic figure... to many of the Church Fathers, Rahab and her house was a TYPE or symbol representing the Christian Church made up of Jews/Gentiles, of (a few) high-born kings but mainly people with a past...people once excluded but NOW embraced.

And IN our own day...when it appears that some are questioning whether we really NEED the Church, Rahab is for US, a fascinating person but more so a powerful symbol of why the world and why YOU need the church. Let's look at the House of Rahab, a story of 1) Intrigue, 2) Inclusion and 3) Instruction.

It's an intriguing story because it's about espionage ... there are spies and lies and secrets and behind-the-scenes deals, people being lowered out of windows and it all takes place in a House of Ill Repute... a brothel.

Two young men (6.23) are sent to see the Land especially Jericho... I THINK they were looking for fruit like the first time (Num 13.20) ...looking for proof/evidence that God was indeed trustworthy and telling the truth about this land...that He was NOT tricking them but was actually going to give the Israelites the Land!

They get there and maybe they stuck out... so they have to find a place to hide... a safe-house. And they happen on a brothel, a house of prostitution. The madam is a prostitute named Rahab

– the name means wide or open or spacious (a now archaic word in our own past for women like this was “broad” – maybe the same idea.)

She has heard of them...and somehow she knows the history of their people so she shelters them ...hides them on her roof among some sheaves of flax (used to make linen fabric). Her house was built somehow INTO the wall.

Then the king gets word about these strange young men roaming the streets of Jericho and he sends word to Rahab – she’s a “broad-minded” woman and maybe she entertained these strangers and the police show up asking whether they’re in Rahab’s House... AND THAT’S WHEN the intrigue rises and when Rahab faces a fork in the road... and she lies.

Most of this chapter is dialogue and the first speech is Rahab lying... “Yep! A couple guys were here... I dunno know from where they came...and I sent them on their way... You can catch ‘em if you hurry!”

She’s a shrewd woman...she may have had a lot of practice making up stories for the men that had come to see her... And so the police leave this shrewd Canaanite woman and they go after the spies who are really on Rahab’s Roof.

Then after it cools down she sneaks up there and starts to negotiate... She refers to their God by the Name He gave Israel to call Him – YHWH: “I know that YHWH has given you this Land and that the terror of you has fallen on us...”

Now, that’s really all these young spies need – they came to find out if their God had paved the way AND HE DEFINITELY HAD PAVED THE WAY! They had the kind of evidence that would’ve encouraged ALL THE ISRAELITES... but they let her continue.

It turns out she knows a lot about this God and His people and His power and promises. He brought them through the sea...defeated kings/cities for them...and she calls Him “GOD of heaven and earth!”

And then she makes the big ask: “I’ve been good to you guys – how bout being good to ME...and my family?...Make a deal! “Deliver our souls from death!”

And for whatever reason... these young scouts... make a promise: We’ll spare you on three conditions: 1) Don’t blow our cover – don’t tell anyone what’s up, 2) You have to hang this RED cord out your window and 3) Only the people who are IN YOUR HOUSE will be spared... we can’t save them unless they're IN.

So she lowers them out the window and gives them an escape route and just before they go out the window they remind her – secret...family inside...red cord...and then the Canaanite

prostitute says words that remind us a lot of another famous woman of the Bible, "(21) According to your words so be it..."

Almost the exact words used by the Virgin Mary to the angel Gabriel, "may it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1.38) – the Prostitute sounds just like the Virgin!

Then she hangs that cord out her window...and probably went to talk to her family about coming to stay with her... "to stay with my weird sister, Rahab!"

Now, I hope you can see in all this intrigue why the early Christian Church saw Rahab as a symbolic person... a prophetic figure whose life and whose HOUSE would prefigure the Church of the Greater and final Joshua, Jesus Christ.

If Joshua is a type of Christ – Rahab is a type of the Church. There's a rich tradition in the Prophets of the Church portrayed as a prostitute. The Book of Hosea and Ezekiel CH 16 are very graphic depictions of God's Bride, the Church as an unfaithful broad.

Something about the coming of Jesus Christ, His doing all that the Law commanded...His fulfilling all the types and shadows of the ceremonial law – now that all is done, now that "It Is Finished", the apostles would say the dividing wall that separates Jew and Gentile – the wall is broken down/abolished in Jesus Christ.

When the Holy Spirit comes in response to Jesus Christ's perfect life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, the Spirit will be poured out "on ALL flesh" – not just Jews, but Gentiles too (Acts 10 & 15).

Remember, in the ministry of Jesus another shrewd Canaanite woman came to the Real Joshua, Jesus Christ and said, "I know I'm NOT a Jew...but please heal my daughter...even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the children's table!" – She was like a new Rahab and Jesus Christ commended her faith and healed her daughter! (Matthew 15.22)

Remember that Jesus Christ told the self-righteous Jewish leaders in that day, "The corrupt tax gatherers AND PROSTITUTES will enter the Kingdom of God before you do!" In other words – entrance is given to the desperate and dissatisfied, the excluded and broken...it comes by GRACE not deserving!

The Church of Jesus Christ made up of Jew and Gentile... people who were excluded from the life of God by sin (Eph 4.18), a "broad" multitude from every tribe, nation, people and tongue are being plucked from a world under judgment and are finding shelter in the Harlot's House... the house that has the sign of Passover, the Blood, the Scarlet Cord. It's why churches in the Anglican tradition often paint the door to the sanctuary RED to say "this is the Harlot's

House...we are the ransomed prostitutes...we have traded our red-light for the Red Cord – the sign of Atonement... God has paid our price!”

We recently made a VERY LITTLE CHANGE to the name of our church... but what if we made a big change...what if we called it what it really IS: “The House of Rahab” – a church bought with Blood, a church for people with a past, a church for the excluded... a church for the condemned, the failed, the flawed and the fallen who have been visited by God’s witnesses, the Law and the Prophets and have received God’s promise, His “hesed”, His rescue!

Now after the intrigue and the emblem of inclusion that Rahab is... how can she instruct us and teach us as a church?

Well, you may know that Rahab shows up three times in the New Testament. In Hebrews CH 11 – the chapter about faith...and how all the heroes who lived before Christ’s coming were NOT really heroes at ALL – just weaklings like WE ARE...but they believed... WELL, Rahab shows up in that chapter, an example of a weak and desperate, excluded person who JUST BELIEVED GOD. The instruction is: believe the Good News of Jesus Christ – that’s the main thing!!

Second, she shows up in the Letter of James where it says, “Rahab believed...and you can tell: when you believe, you get grace from God and that GRACE moves you...like it moved Rahab...she hid the spies... she risked her life... she turned her back on the world...WHY? Because she believed! And if YOU are believing but it doesn't change you... then you’re deceiving yourself – grace, received by faith MOVES YOU!”

– it instructs us to LOOK at Jesus Christ...believe and change is gonna come!

And the other time this prostitute shows up is in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matt 1). It turns out that she was not only spared when Jericho fell but she was INCLUDED in the commonwealth of Israel! The excluded, social pariah who lived on the fringe of society, SHE WAS EMBRACED BY GOD’S PEOPLE.

She went on to marry...a man named Salmon...They had a little boy named Boaz and he grew up and married a woman named Ruth (from the Book of Ruth). Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed who had a son named Jesse who had a son named David who became king in Israel... and out of David’s lineage was born that Greater Joshua, Jesus Christ.

Talk about INCLUSION! This sex-worker, this broad, this Canaanite prostitute was included in the line of Jesus Christ. She had no idea just how embraced she was... How could she know that the scarlet cord (in Hebrew the word for cord is the same word for HOPE!) how could she know that blood-red cord would be fulfilled by her descendent Jesus Christ, the Hope of Nations (Matt 12.21).

That instructs me that the God of GRACE can be trusted...and has great things in store for all who believe...even if we never see it in this life.

Last, and this is the simplest and most direct take-away from today's sermon and that is: stay in the House of Rahab.

People will tell you all kinds of bad things about the church and many of them are true... I've heard of people who were given terrible counsel in churches ...I've heard of people who were disappointed and discarded...judged... neglected... disillusioned.

As much as we wish it were different – this is NOT the House of Betty Crocker...or the House of the Virgin Mary... it's the House of Rahab – God treats us like we are the pure virgin church without spot or wrinkle...but in reality we're people with a past, "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise..."

We all have issues...and we DO hurt each other and we DO have to learn how to forgive... it takes the grace of God and the work of the Spirit... BUT... by all means, STAY IN THE HOUSE OF RAHAB.

We should have great compassion for those who have been hurt by churches... but just like the original Rahab we should do everything we can to win them back... One of the elders asked me this week, "What did Rahab's family say when she invited them to stay in the house?" ("Oh no! I'm not going to her house! She's an embarrassment!") She must have pleaded with them...and so should we.

As Cyprian of Carthage said, "He cannot have God as his Father who has not the Church as his Mother."

Don't give up on the Church!

I don't believe the Church can save us – only Jesus Christ can do that...but the theology of the Church is so rich and so central... Let's believe in Jesus Christ while we pray, labor, hope and seek that God would refine our lives and make us the "Shelter From the Storm" that God intends us to be...

May Jesus Christ beautify The House of Rahab and draw many people to Himself through her.