

Matthew 1:1-6 | 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, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

Matthew 1:1-6 | Advent: Rahab

This is the second week in our Advent series and technically the first week of advent. Advent is a time of looking back on Christ's coming in the flesh and looking forward to Christ's promised return. When the Son of God took on humanity he did not just take on the appearance of man, but took on all that it means to be human. He did not spawn full grown in the middle of the desert. That is not where humans come from. Humans come from humans. We all have a lineage and so too does our Lord. The one who is eternally existent having no beginning and no end has taken upon himself an origin story. Matthew, therefore, begins his gospel with a genealogy.

There are many interpretive threads that we could pick up in Matthew's genealogy but this Advent we are following the thread of the four women. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba are the four women mentioned in Matthews Genealogy leading up to Mary and the birth of our Lord. These four women stand out amidst the repeated refrain of "the father of" and therefore raise the question of why Matthew included these four women. There are two similarities that each of the four women share, the first is that they are all gentiles and the second is that they all intervene directly to preserve the promise and the kingdom at critical points in Israel's history. Jesus brings their stories explicitly into his story and we see that their stories, just like ours, find their highest meaning in Christ's story. This week we look at the story of Rahab.

1. Rahab in the Genealogy

Matthew 1:4-6 | 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, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

The genealogy does not include every generation, as there were certainly generations between Rahab and Boaz, but Matthew is not doing precise chronology so much as he is teaching us a proper christology. There is meaning in the way he is telling the story of Christ's lineage therefore we should pay attention to who he highlights in the lineage. Rahab's story as told in Joshua does not include her marriage or a birth narrative, but Matthew shows us she is connected to the line which leads to Boaz and Jesse and finally King David.

Therefore the emphasis of Rahab's story is not on her preservation of the line, but on her faithfulness bringing in the kingdom. It is a moment in which the kingdom hangs by a thread that is made all the more delicate by our understanding Israel's history. The faith of the gentile Rahab becomes the critical piece in the first movement to acquire the promised land. And her story is one of the most thrilling in all of scripture.

2. Rahab's Deception

Joshua 2:1 | 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.

Moses had died along with the whole of the generation who fled from Egypt. None of that generation entered the promised land, although they had a clear opportunity and a moment just like this one. Moses sent a group of spies across the Jordan to spy out the land in Numbers 13. They gathered fruit from the land and described it as good land but they had a deep fear of the people who lived in the land and described them as giants. The people are deeply discouraged by the report of the spies and vie to replace Moses and get a new leader to take them back to Egypt. Of the spies only Joshua and Caleb stand with the promise of the Lord but it is not sufficient and the people do not enter the promised land.

The story of Rahab begins at the same juncture one generation later. Moses has died and Joshua replaced him and on the cusp of the promised land Joshua sends spies of his own. It is a defining moment in the history of Israel where once again the promised land hangs in the balance. This time the emphasis however is not upon the spies who are sent but upon the one whom they meet. Immediately in the story they come into the house of Rahab.

Rahab was a prostitute and her house was on the edge of the city built into the wall of the city itself. The house is probably best thought of as a hostel or tavern that travelers would stay in. The public nature of the house meant that news quickly reached the king of Jericho that spies are in the area. That is why the King sends his men to Rahab demanding that she bring out the men who entered her house. But Rahab inexplicably, at first, guards the spies.

Joshua 2:4 | 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.

She misdirects the king's men telling them the spies had snuck out of the gate before it closed but that they could catch them if they went quickly. So out the gate the pursuers go. We have to understand deception of an enemy in wartime is permissible just as killing an enemy in wartime is permissible. But why did she consider her own people enemies?

3. Rahab's Faith

Rahab had hidden the men in the stalks of flax laid in order on her roof and after the king's men were deflected she went up to the roof to speak with the spies. Here we find out why Rahab sided with the spies against her own people. This is one of the coolest bits of dialogue in scripture.

Joshua 2:9 | 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.

Rahab knows that the lord has given the land to the Israelites. The fear of the Israelites had fallen upon her people and all the inhabitants of the land melt away before them. I think this first section of Rahab's speech is particularly incredible with the backdrop of the first Israelite spies that were sent into the land. Surely it was the case that the enemies melted away before them then too, but instead they melted away before their enemies. The true faith in what the Lord would accomplish was made effective in this gentile prostitute. Why is it that she has such faith in the Lord? She has heard what the Lord has done for them!

Joshua 2:10 | 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.

She heard that the Lord had dried up the water of the red sea so that this people would be brought out of Egypt. She heard that the kings of the Amorites were devoted to destruction by the Israelites in the wilderness. She had only heard of the faithfulness of the Lord to this people but she trusted that this showed what the Lord was like and that he had chosen this people from all the people's of the earth.

Joshua 2:11 | 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.

Not only did Rahab hear and believe these stories but she understood what they meant. The God of the Israelites is the true God. The God of the heavens and of the earth. He is all powerful above in the heavens and therefore he is authoritative with absolute power and nothing can stand in his way. And he is the God on the earth beneath so that he has presence and care for his people on whom he has set his affections. What of these Israelites? Are they formidable warriors, particularly courageous? Rahab knows this does not matter. What matters about the Israelites is that the Lord is with them. They are God's people and their God is the true God.

Consider her faith against the backdrop of the first generation's spies who went in to see the land and came back with such a fearful negative report. They had not merely heard of

the Lord's care for them as this current generation had or as Rahab had but they had experienced yet. Yet such was their hardness of heart that even after receiving such a great salvation they did not consider God to be faithful to bring them into the Land. Has anyone ever heard of a God who raised up a people for himself and drew them out of another nation by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm? What of these spies and their disposition? God had seen to it that by the faith of a gentile prostitute they would encounter the reality of who God is and who they are. The conquest is on.

Here is the similarity between each of the four women in this genealogy they are the gentiles that are brought in and when they are brought in the kingdom is established. Now Rahab makes a covenant with the spies.

Joshua 2:12–13 | 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 sign ¹³ 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."

Rahab does not just see and recognize the Lordship of God but she moves in faith to position herself and her family under his salvation. Of course you see the ordinary pattern of redemption in scripture taking place at the level of the family. And Rahab acts in faithfulness towards the spies in hopes of the faithfulness of God towards her and her household. I mean had this gentile read the Abrahamic covenant? The spies agree of course, and stake their lives for her own in so far as she is faithful to not reveal them.

Joshua 2:18 | 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.

The instruction the spies leave her is to place a scarlet cord in her window so that her home will be marked and her family will be spared. I don't see how we can view the emphasis on the scarlet cord as anything other than a passover reference. But while the angel of the Lord conquered Egypt and passed over the Jews homes who were marked by the blood of the lamb. The Jews themselves would pass through Jericho and passover the home of the one marked by the red cord who had brought herself and her family out from under the identity of her people and into the people of God.

Hebrews 11:31 | By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Rahab is brought into Christ's story and celebrated for her faithfulness. She is the gentile who was willing to be counted treasonous for the sake of the true king and in doing so joins the lineage of our Lord. The spies aren't named, Rahab is named. Rahab risked her life so that she and her family may be spared from the wrath of the true God. Identifying

with her perceived enemies. But Jesus gave his life for the sake of his enemies by identifying with us. Rahab is brought into Christs story. May we believe like she believed in God. That he really parted the sea. That Christ really gave himself for us. That the red cord that brings us into his people is his own blood. And may her faith lend us courage to be counted treasonous against our own culture that we might be counted among the chosen.