

This morning I am in the second week of a sermon series I am doing on the Old Testament book of Joshua, the sixth book of the Bible. If you're unfamiliar with this book of the Bible, the historical context is that the Israelites, who were enslaved in Egypt, have been set free by God, using a man named Moses, with the plan of bringing them to the land of Canaan, a land which God had promised to their ancestor Abraham 600 years earlier. Unfortunately, when Moses sent people to spy out the land, 10 of the 12 spies came back saying that there was no way they could defeat the inhabitants of the land, while only 2 of the spies – Joshua and Caleb – encouraged them that if God had promised them the land, then He would make a way for them to enter it. Unfortunately, the negative report of the 10 spies caused fear to spread throughout the camp. As a result of their fear and disobedience, God caused the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, would die out. In the beginning of the book of Joshua, the 40 years has passed, Moses has died, and they are once again on the border of the promised land. This morning, we are going to read through chapter 2 and see what we learn about knowing and following God:

***Joshua 2:1-24*** - *Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. <sup>2</sup> The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." <sup>3</sup> So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." <sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. <sup>5</sup> At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." <sup>6</sup> (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) <sup>7</sup> So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.*

Notice first of all that history is repeating itself. Just as Moses sent out 12 spies 40 years ago to spy out the land, now Joshua is doing the same, sending 2 spies out to check out the land. The first city they encounter in Canaan is Jericho, a large walled city. The two spies go and stay at the home of a prostitute named Rahab, who as we will find out lives in the city wall, where many homes were. It's a good place to hide out – not only is it in the city wall, allowing for easy entrance and exit, but many people would come and go, including travelers. Unfortunately, however, the spies have not gone undetected, and so when the king hears about them, he sends men to find them. But Rahab hides the spies, tells the men of

Jericho that they have left and she doesn't know where they have gone, and then sends the men of Jericho out of the city in pursuit.

Now, while this is not the main focus of the passage, some have had issues with Rahab's lies and questioned whether or not this is a godly thing to do. Because in the New Testament, even though it seems like she is lying, Rahab is commended for her faith in this situation.

*James 2:25 - In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?*

This is where it can be helpful to understand their culture. Truth **in Israel was not defined by agreement with fact, but by loyalty towards the Lord.** Rahab is praised for her faith in acting truthfully because she acted in loyalty to the Lord instead of out of fear of man, even if that loyalty meant lying to those who sought to capture and kill the spies.

Let's continue reading:

*<sup>8</sup> Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof <sup>9</sup> and said to them, "I know that **the LORD has given this land to you** and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. <sup>10</sup> We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. <sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for **the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.** <sup>12</sup> Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign <sup>13</sup> that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death." <sup>14</sup> "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."*

Evidently word has gotten around through all the travelers who have come to her home that the Israelites are no normal people, but belong to the one true God. She confesses that their God is the one true God, and asks them to show mercy to her family when they come to take the city. This is **greater faith than the first spies who came to the promised land had.** Even though it means abandoning her

fellow citizens of Jericho, she chooses to align herself with God and the Israelites, and the spies promise to save her and her family.

Let's finish the chapter:

*<sup>15</sup> So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. <sup>16</sup> Now she had said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way." <sup>17</sup> The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us <sup>18</sup> unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. <sup>19</sup> If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. <sup>20</sup> But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear." <sup>21</sup> "Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window. <sup>22</sup> When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. <sup>23</sup> Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. <sup>24</sup> They said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."*

The spies return to Joshua, and the report back to the Israelites is much better this go around. There is confirmation that this land is indeed theirs for the taking. And soon, they will cross the Jordan, march around the city, and the walls of Jericho will fall and they will enter the Promised Land. And Rahab and her family hang the scarlet cord in the window and are spared.

***Joshua 6:25*** - *But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho-- and she lives among the Israelites to this day.*

Let me share two things about this story and what it means for us today:

**1) Rabab's story points us to the gospel of God's saving grace for sinners**

Remember what I shared last Sunday. Every OT story points us to Jesus. In the beginning of Matthew's gospel is a genealogy, a listing of Jesus' ancestors through his mother Mary. And who do you think shows up there?

***Matthew 1:3-6** - Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, <sup>4</sup> Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>5</sup> Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, <sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,*

In those days, a genealogy was like a resume. No women were ever mentioned. And surely no women like Rahab. That would be like listing your failed jobs on your resume. But Jesus' genealogy lists not only Rahab but Tamar, who tricked her father-in-law Judah into sleeping with her in order to provide a baby, David and Bathsheba, the king who slept with his friend's wife and then had her husband killed to try to cover it up, and Ruth and Boaz, a young foreigner who proposed marriage to an Israelite man in order to make sure her mother-in-law would be cared for. And now we see that even Rahab, the prostitute, is listed as part of Jesus' lineage. **That tells me that Jesus is not ashamed to call Rahab part of His family. Which tells me he is also never ashamed to call us part of His family, no matter what we have done.**

Remember, Rahab is a prostitute. She is living among a people whose sin has reached the point of no return – immorality, child sacrifice, and so on. There is no hope any more for redemption for the Canaanites. They are about to meet the judgment of God at the hand of the Israelites, something we will discuss more in upcoming weeks. And yet this one woman, who it seems is very much living according to the ways of Canaan, is saved because she is willing to leave the way of Canaan and to put her trust in God.

I have listened to debates where atheists clearly hate this. How is it just that some people are destroyed just because they don't believe in the Christian God, while others are saved just because they do, no matter what they have done in their life? But this is at the heart of the Biblical message, that even the worst sinner can be saved simply by trusting in God:

***Romans 5:6-9** - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates*

*his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

This salvation is because Jesus took the punishment we deserved and gave us His righteousness, His right relationship with God the Father:

**2 Corinthians 5:21** - **God** made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become **the righteousness of God**.

At its heart, the Bible is the story of a God who created a good world and people in His image to enjoy fellowship with Him. It's the story of mankind turning from God and rejecting Him as their Lord to be their own god and make their own decisions. And this holy God, who had every right to destroy mankind in their sin, loved them so much that He sent His son, Jesus, to live a perfect life, to die on the cross, and to rise again, conquering sin and death, so that all who would turn from their sin, from making themselves the center of their life, and trust in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, will be righteous in God's sight, will know God, and have the eternal kind of life, now and forever.

**Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute who becomes a part of God's family, an ancestor of Jesus even, not because she deserved it by her morality, but because of the grace of God shown to her.** And, she is not only included in the genealogy of Jesus, but in the roll call of faith in Hebrews 11 – look at the list of names: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab?

**Hebrews 11:30-31** *By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. <sup>31</sup> By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.*

Rahab believes that God can save her from the coming judgment. If you remember in Rahab's story, she is saved because she puts a **scarlet cord** out her window, so that even though the rest of the city will be destroyed, she will not. What does this sound like? The scarlet cord reminds us of the Exodus, the Passover – the blood of the lamb, the red cord, and judgment will pass over your house. And it points forward to how the blood of Jesus is what rescues us from wrath, from death, and brings us into eternal life.

The heart of the story of Rahab is the gospel story. It's the story of a God who shows grace to those who trust in Him, no matter what they have done. It's a God who uses those whose lives are messy, who are far from perfect, but trust in Him. It's about a God who is not afraid to get His hands dirty, to work through scandalous and questionable people in order to save His people. **There is redemption. There is forgiveness. There is a second act. There is hope.**

In the end, she is not just Rahab the prostitute, but Rahab the woman of faith, Rahab the righteous.

## 2) Faith in God will mean choosing loyalty to Him over loyalty to man

Rahab does not simply have a faith in word only; she shows her faith by her deeds, by being willing to risk her safety and separate herself from her countrymen in order to protect the spies that she believes represent the one true God.

*James 2:24-26 - You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

Remember that to the Israelite, truth is about more than not lying; it is about loyalty to God. **Think of Corrie Ten Boom and her family in World War II**, risking her family's life by hiding Jews in the family home in the Netherlands and lying about it to the Nazis. Faith in God is going to display itself in loyalty to Him over loyalty to men.

*Matthew 10:32-38 - Whoever **acknowledges** me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. <sup>34</sup> "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- <sup>36</sup> a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' <sup>37</sup> "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup> and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

How is that for family values? Not exactly Jesus meek and mild, is it? Don't take this the wrong way, as an excuse for sin. But loyalty to God will mean animosity

with the world. This would have been especially hard in a more traditional culture. Loyalty to God will mean choosing Him over even father or mother. And he gets even more scary in John 15:

**John 15:18-21** *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. <sup>21</sup> They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.*

Faith in God is going to mean at times incurring the hatred of the world, even of your own family, because your loyalty is now primarily to God. Again, don't take this the wrong way, as an excuse for sin. But this is the reality of what it means to follow God. **Many of you will face this at work** I am sure, making decisions that others don't understand that will lead to ridicule. You may not go to the places your co-workers go or talk about the things they do, or agree with their views on things. You may face this in your family, if others do not share your beliefs. You may face it among your neighbors and in your community.

What does loyalty to God look like in this day and age? It will mean standing against the ideologies of our day, even if it means being hated. We are first and foremost citizens of heaven, loyal to our God.

It means my loyalty is not to Donald Trump or the Republican party, nor is it to Joe Biden and the Democratic party.

My loyalty is not to the social justice movements of our day. My loyalty is to the God of justice, who shows no partiality, in whom every human being is a member of the race of Adam, and who calls us to love as the Good Samaritan did, being willing to risk our safety in the care for the hurting.

My loyalty is not to our culture's radical individualism, where people are free to identify and define themselves however they please.

My loyalty is not to power, wealth, and status, as if those things could save anyone.

My loyalty is to the God of heaven and earth.

