

Joshua 2 **Rahab's Redemption**

We are going to Joshua 2 today.

Just a brief recap, in last week's passage, Moses had died. So God told Joshua to buckle up, be strong and courageous and devoted to God's law, because he was about to lead the people across the Jordan into the promised land. It would be the fulfillment of promises made to generations of Israelites going back about 750 years.

So the rest of chapter 1, Joshua rallied the people, and they pledged allegiance to Joshua. And so things were ramping up to the moment when they would enter the land.

So now we pick up in chapter 2.

Joshua 2:1-24 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.

So Joshua has been told by God that they would be taking the land. And now he is sending spies into that land to assess the situation. God promised and Joshua planned.

And we are never told that this represented a lack of faith on Joshua's part.

Sometimes we think that we have to choose to live by faith OR we have to choose to make a plan. But Joshua, full of faith, confident in God's faithfulness to keep his promises, now sends in spies to assess the land and make a plan. Faithful planning and preparing is a thing.

We think we have to choose sometimes, when we don't.

So we might be tempted to think, “God has promised to provide for me, so I don’t need to apply to jobs.” But affirming that God provides doesn’t mean we are then passive. We believe in God’s promise to provide and we send out the resume’s.

I know among Pastors there are some who would criticize sermon preparation (especially how I do it, which is with a full manuscript) and they would say that, instead, preaching should be led by the Spirit. I want to affirm that the Spirit leads in preaching, and that He leads in preparation during the week.

We may be tempted to think that if we ask God to heal us, we are acting without faith to seek medical help. But we can faithfully seek medical help and receive medicine as an answer to prayers. And when it works, we praise God for healing.

We don’t choose between being led by God and planning and preparing. Both are true - because God is faithful to care for his people, his people plan and prepare and work hard. Faith always manifests in action.

In fact, as God has promised his people the land and Joshua prepares for battle, we will see in this chapter, not a judgment from God for Joshua’s always planning, but one of the most remarkable stories of redemption in all of scripture.

So these two men go into the city of Jericho.

Jericho is a walled-city, for now. And we know that it is wicked. We know this because 750 years ago when God promised Abraham this land, He told him that the reason he couldn’t go in and conquer this promised land yet was because “The iniquity of the Ammorites is not yet complete” (Genesis 14:16). (The Ammorites were the people occupying the land at the time.)

God is incredibly patient, and he allows a people to become exceedingly wicked before He executes judgment on them (as we will see him do in chapters ahead - in a couple of weeks we will come back to addressing the hard questions about this conquest, the war, the judgment, and the violence involved in the whole thing. But for now, we know the city is as bad as it can get and is about to have God’s judgment come down on it in the form of an Israelite invasion.

So this city is peak-evil. (It seems there was all kinds of false worship, child sacrifice, sexual immorality - it was corrupt to the core.)

And right there in the mix, participating in the sins of the city, is Rahab the prostitute. This is a dreadful place, and at the bottom of the mire is this woman Rahab. She is participating in the sins of the city, she is being devoured by the sins of the city. She spends her life being used and abused for money or as part of pagan worship. She is as low as you can go.

Rahab is a Canaanite, she is not Jewish. She does not yet worship the God of Israel. She is apparently practicing her trade regularly enough that it wasn't unusual for men to come in to stay with her, so the spies think that the lodge that she ran would be a good place to go unnoticed.

So the guys sneak in, but apparently aren't that good at being sneaky, because it is reported to the king of Jericho that they are there and that they're staying the night at Rahab's place:

Joshua 2:2 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."

So the king sends some soldiers and they demand that she send out the spies that have come into her house.

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. 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.

So Rahab, who made a living giving wicked men what they wanted, is now confronted by the most powerful of the wicked men, the king of Jericho, who demands that she send out those two spies.

And rather than give the man what he wanted, Rahab lied.

She had hidden the guys on the roof under some stalks of flax that were drying out, and she tells the king's men, "You just missed them, they're just outside the city, go get them!" They rush out of the city to go find them, and the spies are saved.

Which raises a question: was it OK for Rahab to lie?

There's a commandment against this. But at the same time, we'll see soon that God Himself commends her as a woman of faith. This is an act of heroism.

And we have to be really cautious about saying the ends justify the means when assessing an action.

Once we start saying "It's ok to lie in some circumstances," our nature is to continually expand the circumstances until it essentially isn't a sin to lie at all anymore. We tend to take any exception at all as a license to sin, and we don't know our hearts very well if we think we won't do that. We will allow a very rare exception to justify all kinds of sins.

Calvin also cautioned against this approach, saying that those who are ok with "dutiful lies" "do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God."¹ So we should not take this as a license to deceive, God loves the truth and God hates lies.

(Proverbs 12:22 "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight.")

We could certainly spend the whole sermon on this issue, was the lie itself a sin that she committed in order to do right? And it may have been.

But I believe the simplest explanation is that a just war does provide some grounds for doing things that are normally against the commandments.

God says "do not murder," but a soldier who kills on the right side of a just war is not sinning. An American soldier in battle shooting a Nazi soldier in WWII wasn't sinning. Romans 13 says civil authorities are given the sword to fight evil. So if you could kill in battle without it being sin, you could certainly lie in battle without it being sin.

But again, let's not trust our hearts. We live in a day when we exaggerate everything, and we call everything a battle. And every enemy Hitler. A battle needs to be an actual battle

¹ Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of Joshua, 47.

before we even start talking exceptions here. A conflict with someone isn't a battle. The annoying neighbor isn't Hitler. A battle involves armies and weapons - and not just metaphorical ones.

If we believe we are justified in our lie to someone, we are saying that we are doing so as part of a war with them. And our daily relational difficulties don't constitute a war. So we tell the truth, even when it is costly. Let's not misuse scripture to support our motives to sin or make excuses for sin.

But in this instance, we'll see in a second there are rumblings of war. The soldiers have actually been mustered. She knows the Israelites are about to attack the city. And she participates in the war, but doesn't take the side of the people of Jericho, she takes the side of the God of Israel and the people of Israel.

And in the New Testament, twice she is commended as a woman of faith. In Hebrews 11 and James 2.

And remember that the right kind of faith has the right object - she doesn't just believe in general, but she believes in some very specific truths about God:

I. The Faith of Rahab (Joshua 2:1-13)

A. God Keeps His Promises (vv. 8-9)

8 Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof 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.

The Israelites, who had been raised on this stuff, often struggled to believe that God would keep his promise and give them the land. They wandered for 40 years because they thought the inhabitants of the land were too many and too mighty.

But here is a gentile prostitute, a total outsider, and she believes more than they did. She has only heard about what God has done for his people, but she believes. A whole generation of Israel died in the wilderness because they experienced it and still didn't believe.

So, by faith, she believes that God keeps His promises. She also believes that God acts on behalf of His people.

B. God Acts on Behalf of His People (v. 10)

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 had heard about what God had done for the Israelites. The news of the Exodus that happened 40 years earlier has spread - this God parted the Red Sea to open up the land to his people. God made his people strong, even against strong enemies.

She heard about how God was acting for them when they came out of Egypt. Remember in Egypt God sent the plagues, and the final plague was the death of the firstborn. But if the people put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, then the angel of destruction passed over them and they were spared.

She knows that God is alive and active and doing these things. The stories of God are not just fairy tales and myths and legends, but God is alive and active.

She also believed that:

C. God Is To Be Feared for His Judgments (v.11)

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.

She says, "We heard these stories, and our hearts melted." That phrase is used again in Joshua 5:1 when the Israelites cross the Jordan - the kings of the land are terrified and their hearts melt and they lose their spirit. Again in Joshua 7:5 when the Israelites lose a battle - it's a feeling of doom.

And Rahab said, "Our people feel that way - we know God is acting for the Israelites and we know we are going to be judged."

God is not a God who puts up with sin forever.

Hebrews 10:26-27 “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”

Rahab knows that she has been sinning and that her city has been sinning. And as she sees the Israelite soldiers mustering she knows that the time is near. God is incredibly patient, but there does come a time when He says, “Your sin will go this far and no farther - too much profaning of God’s law, too many lives being destroyed.” She looks around the city and sees their sin, she looks at herself and sees her sin, and her heart melts because she knows.

She knows He is just. She knows about the infants slaughtered. She knows about families ruined through immorality. She knows about the high-handed rebellion against God’s created order in her city and in her heart.

And notice how her response is a little different than that of everyone else in Jericho. They’re all in fear.

But the king of Jericho responds to His fear of God by fighting God - he goes after the spies. He rages against God in some kind of vain hope in winning. His heart melts and he just keeps fighting God.

Her heart melts and she yields to God. She sides with God. She knows that she wants to be on the right side of this battle, and the prostitute from Jericho is, by nature, on the wrong side.

But she knows something else. She has heard the stories. She heard about the Exodus from Egypt. She heard that even though the Israelites deserved to die for their sins just like the Egyptians did, God was merciful to his people. God saved his people, he spared the firstborn in the passover.

So, knowing that God is merciful, she pleads for mercy:

D. God Is Merciful (vv. 12-13)

Joshua 2:12 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 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."

So Rahab, with her heart melted with fear, begs on behalf of herself and her family that they would be saved from the coming judgment.

She is certainly acting in self-interest here, and she knows that it would be best if she got on the Lord's side. I'm sure her motives are mixed - she really believes in the Lord, but also doesn't want to die in battle so she makes this request. It would be hard to say it was nothing but a love for the Lord that compelled her here, there was also fear of all of those soldiers gathering across the Jordan. But God met her there.

She didn't wait until she was sure she was doing this for the right reasons to make the plea, she brought all of her mixed motives to the Lord's people and asked them to spare her life.

And even though she is right there participating in the wickedness of the city, her heart has now become soft, and she knows there's some hope - even for her. She has heard the stories of God's mercy.

II. The Faithfulness of the Rescuers (Joshua 2:14-21)

So the men make an oath to her:

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."

So Rahab is in her lodge, the place where the men of the city come to use and abuse her. But these men of Israel pledge their lives to her. It's safe to say that these are not the kinds of guys she typically works with.

The pagan men said Rahab exists for us - for our own sick pleasures. The men of Israel said, "We will give our lives for you."

The Bible doesn't exaggerate the lived virtues of the redeemed people. You read the bible and see many ways that men of God do not live up to their ideals. There is sin and failure, even among the people of God.

But the ideal men in God's community don't use the women, but give their lives for the women. This is supposed to be a big difference between men who know the Lord and men who don't. Men in the redeemed community say, "My life for yours" - we will sacrifice our lives and our bodies if necessary to protect you. Men of Jericho say "Your life exists for me."

Men who know the Lord strive to love their neighbor as themselves. This means that they strive not to do things that use women. Which includes things like prostitution, but also includes things like pornography which is denegrating to women, like participating in hookup culture which has far more negative effects on women than men, like living together outside of marriage (which study after study have shown does more damage to women than to men.) Men who are faithful to the Lord don't abuse women, and they stand up to those who do. And they repent when they fall short of those ideals.

The community of the redeemed is supposed to be very different than the broader community in Jericho or in Rochester.

And these men, instead of taking from her, pledge their lives for her. Faith always manifests itself in action.

Joshua 2:15 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.

So she helps the men escape. And they promise that when the battle of Jericho comes, everybody will know that you don't lay a hand on anyone in the lodge where the scarlet cord is in the window.

Rahab has heard of the passover. She heard how the houses marked with the blood of the lamb were passed over by the angel of destruction. And now, knowing a judgment from God is coming on her city, she is told, "Mark your house with scarlet and you'll be spared."

And sure enough, we will see in the fall of Jericho in chapter 6, that her house is spared.

And it isn't just that she gets to survive that battle.

What happens in her life is the turn-around of all turns-around.

She is the lowest of the low. But she hears of God's story. And God meets her in the lowest place through His word and through His people. And she is not only spared, but redeemed, changed, and welcomed into the community of God's people.

In the New Testament, in Hebrews 11, there's a list that's sometimes called the faith hall of fame. And it lists Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and then you get to verse 31 and it says:

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."

This woman, who starts this story as the lowest of the low, is included among the greats.

And it gets even better. She is completely included in this community.

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."

Look what comes of Rahab. She marries an Israelite named Salmon. They have a son named Boaz. So Boaz grows up with this redeemed Gentile mother Rahab. Then later he meets a Gentile woman named Ruth, and marries her.

3 Generations later comes king David, the greatest king of Israel, until his descendant Jesus is born.

Talk about a redemption - Rahab starts as a wicked woman in the bowels of a wicked city, she meets God, she meets the godly men of this redeemed community, her life is spared, and then she is included in the royal line that eventually led to the birth of Jesus.

She becomes a prime example of what Jesus promised in **Matthew 20:16: “The last shall be first.”**

She, the least, is listed among the greatest. We don't even know the name of the greatest man in Jericho (he's just the “king of Jericho,”) but we do know the name of Rahab, the lowest one in Jericho.

Look where she was when God came to her. She is on what one author called “Humanity's bathroom floor.”² A pagan non-Jew, a used and guilty prostitute, she has nothing - no status, no influence, no morality, no goodness in herself, but she heard about God's judgment and mercy. She heard about the rescue from Egypt.

And then she sides with the God of Israel, hangs the scarlet chord to mark her house with the same color their houses were marked with at the passover, and she is completely and totally redeemed.

And this happened because she saw the judgment of God and trusted in the mercy of God.

All of this was confirmed by a great oath. The spies swear, “Our lives for yours!”

Who else made a promise like that? Jesus.

The oath of Joshua 2 reminds of substitutionary atonement: that Jesus died in our place.

² <https://www.nightbirde.co/blog/blog-post-title-three-2rjnk>

Now, I imagine that Rahab had to wonder at times...Will they keep their word? What is going to happen? What if the soldiers don't see the cord in the window? What if there is a mixup? I wonder if you have ever wondered about the promise of God in the gospel to rescue you from his judgment?

“What if God changes his mind?”

The Gospel is a greater oath...

Hebrews 6:17-20 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things [the promise and the oath/covenant] in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

God has made a promise, cut a covenant, demonstrated his trustworthiness by not withholding his own son...we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and Secure...

The story of Rahab is the story of you and me. We were under God's judgment. But God in his marvelous grace, offers his Son as refuge. And by turning to him in faith we not only find rescue from certain death but inclusion into his people.

Questions for Discussion in Small Groups:

1. How is it significant that God came to Rahab when she was at her lowest?
2. In what way is grace magnified when we have nothing to give?
3. Discuss the idea that “faith always manifests itself in action.”
4. Why is the scarlet cord significant?

5. Why does it matter that Rahab was a gentile?
6. How does faith in Jesus make us part of a new community?
7. How does the community of the faithful differ from the greater community of non-believers around us?