

The divorce of my parents. Meeting the Roberts family, the family who led me to Christ. Choosing a small college in Kansas. Moving to Dallas. Meeting a pretty girl named Martha at a bar...I was there doing ministry. A bad report from my doctor. A struggling business. The birth of my sons. My transition to vocational ministry. These are but a few examples of what I would call my “hinge moments”, moments that changed the trajectory of my life forever.

I’m sure, very quickly, you thought of a few of your own. They may have to do with family, catastrophe or death, your faith, your work. Each of our stories includes these moments that have a permanent impact on our life’s direction.

This morning we’re going to continue in our series in the book of Joshua, where we are learning how God gets his people from ‘here’ to ‘there’. At the beginning of chapter 2, we’re going to find the nation of Israel at the edge of the Promised Land, at the edge of the river, and most certainly at a hinge moment in their history. God has brought them back here and called them to follow Joshua, to cross the Jordan River, and to claim their inheritance. What would they decide? Would they trust God and move forward? Or would they retreat in fear? And ultimately, how would God inspire the strength and courage in them as they made their decision?

The same questions could be asked of us. You see, we all stand at the edge of the river. God is calling our church to a new mission, and he’s calling each of us to step out in faith to find and follow our God-given purpose. How will we respond? What can we learn from God’s dealings with Israel that inspires strength and courage in us as we make the decision? This passage shows us two things we can do now to give us confidence to cross the river.

Start where you are: You are ‘here’.

If you’ve ever been to a mall, you’ve seen those huge maps. And on those maps is usually a notation that helps you get your bearings by showing you exactly where you are. It helps you see where you’ve come from and it helps you see what you need to do to get where you’re going. Joshua makes a move to establish what ‘here’ is for his people, but it goes well beyond their geographic location.

[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.

The Israelites are about seven miles east of the Jordan River in an area called Shittim. God is about to move Israel against Jericho, and Joshua wants intelligence regarding its gates, towers, military, and the morale of its people. Now understand, Jericho is not some sprawling city. Jericho is a city-state strategically located just west of the Jordan. It is a walled fortress covering somewhere between 10-13 acres. Our property is about 10 acres, so you can see it’s not very big. Joshua wants to know where things stand in Jericho.

But there’s more going on here than just the gathering of military intelligence. I believe it is a test for Israel and an opportunity for them to see their God as the God of second chances.

40 years prior to this, Israel had another hinge moment, just like the one we read about here. As Gary talked about last week, Israel was set to enter into the Promised Land and claim their inheritance. Moses sent twelve men to spy out the land and, upon their return, ten were afflicted with the “grasshopper complex”. They gave a bad report because the work to claim their inheritance was too much to bear. Since they couldn’t push the fast-forward button and circumvent the long war ahead of them, they shrunk in fear and sounded the retreat. That decision initiated a 40-year change in trajectory.

Additionally, Israel had been at this location of Shittim before, and it didn’t go so well. We read in Numbers 25 that they were, again, set to enter the Promised Land but disobeyed God by engaging in sexual immorality with Moabite women and worshipping their god Baal. The enflamed the anger of the Lord, and he killed 24,000 of those who had committed those acts.

But in spite of all that, here they are again, in Shittim, sending in spies, and on the cusp of entering into the Promised Land. They are being given another chance because their God is merciful, faithful, and he will accomplish what he said he will accomplish.

Do you know where you are? Do you have an accurate assessment of where God has you right now? Some of you have been to the edge of the river and, for whatever reason, chose not to cross, or lived in a way that prevented you from doing so. We must resist focusing on all the obstacles that exist between ‘here’ and ‘there’. We may not have to face the powerful sons of Anak, like the Israelites, but there will certainly be some challenging times in living out our God-given purpose. If we try to get around those times, or let ourselves get overwhelmed by them, we won’t cross. Additionally, we cannot go back and correct past mistakes, but we also don’t have to look back and assume those mistakes have disqualified us from crossing the river and living out our purpose from God.

God knows exactly where you are right now. He’s taken care of your past on the Cross, and he will be with you at the river when you cross. Our focus is to be on where we are right now, ready to faithfully take God’s next step for our lives.

So we can move forward with confidence when we start where we are, which is here, and we can move forward in confidence when we **Trust that God is already working ‘there’**.

The end of verse 1 introduces us to this character named Rahab. It tells us that she is a prostitute. Could it be that the spies are already living out the sins of the past? The text really gives us no clue as to why they go to her house, though there seems to be no suggestion of sexual impropriety. There is some thought that she is an innkeeper and her home is one where outsiders would naturally go. Ultimately, we can trust in the providence of God connecting the two spies to her. She is about to do a remarkable thing and about to say a remarkable thing to show the God of Israel has already been at work in Jericho.

[JOSHUA 2:2-6] ² **And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.”** (Remember, it’s a small place. Not only would they stick out, but Jericho is on alert because Israel is just on the other side of the Jordan. They’re looking for threats.) 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.”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.”

This was a hinge moment for Rahab. The trajectory of her life had certainly been changed forever. Why would she do such a thing for two strangers? She has committed treason against her people and lied to her king. Why would she put herself at such risk? It's because the God of Israel had already been at work in Jericho. Let's keep reading.

[JOSHUA 2:8-11]⁸ Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof⁹ 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.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.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.

Rahab's words must have floored the two Jewish spies. First, she said with confidence that the Lord had given Israel the land. Even though the Israeli army is still on the other side of the Jordan, she essentially proclaims the battle is already over. Can you imagine doing anything competitive where your opponent tells you beforehand that you've already won?

Second, it's clear that word of God's work had found its way to Jericho. Rahab references God's parting of the Red Sea and the military defeat of two Amorite kings. This resulted in the hearts of all the Canaanite people melting in fear. This was music to the spies' ears, and would have been especially encouraging because, in Deuteronomy 2:25, God told them, “This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you.” Mission accomplished. An enemy cowering in fear is one easily defeated.

And finally, we get to the end of v.11, where Rahab says, “For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.” What a surprise to these spies, and what an encouragement to us.

The God of salvation is on the move in Jericho. This is Rahab's confession of faith in the one true God. Her understanding of him is limited. She didn't get visited by Jewish evangelists who gave her a pamphlet telling her all about Yahweh. But she responded in belief to what she heard of him and came to saving faith. And the same God who revealed himself to Canaanite prostitute is still at work in the world today. He's already 'there', preparing the way for when we arrive.

Something else we need to be encouraged by is that God used this woman to accomplish his purposes. We might read this story and wonder how her faith and her lifestyle are compatible.

God is not condoning her profession or her methods, but he did use those circumstances to bring about his purpose. Something we need to understand is that Rahab is “starting where she is”, and her ‘here’ is in Jericho. She was in a culture where prostitution was common. She lived in a culture that considered deception an art form. She knew very little of God, certainly not his standards for life with regards to truth and sexuality, but responded fully to the revelation she was given. And you know what? It was enough. This isn’t the last time we hear of Rahab. We find Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus, and both the book of Hebrews and the book of James commend her for her faith in hiding the spies.

You may be here this morning and, like Rahab, you know very little about God, but you want to follow him. Know that Jesus Christ has done everything needed to make it possible to have a relationship with God. He died on the Cross for your sins, and he rose again. All you have to do is believe. You may also be here this morning and think God can’t use you, that you have to get cleaned up before. But understand that spiritual growth is a process. And while we want everyone moving in the direction of maturity, we’re confident God can use anyone whose heart is turned towards him, just like he did Rahab.

That evidence of God’s work was not just reserved for the two spies. Rahab initiated a covenant with them. **[JOSHUA 2:12-13] 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.”**

The spies agreed to her request and told her to tie a scarlet cord in the window through which they escaped, which was built into the city wall. That way the Israelites would know who helped them and would pass over her house when they attacked, sparing everyone inside. And here’s the cool part. When we get to chapter 6 of Joshua, we’re going to read about how God has the Israelites march around the city over and over again. And as they march by her house, they’ll see this scarlet cord, over and over again. And they’ll be reminded of an act of God’s mercy from their own history, where they put red lamb’s blood on their door posts and the judgment of the Lord passed over their homes and families. In this episode of military conquest, of God’s judgment on Jericho and all the death that goes with it, that scarlet cord will be a symbol of God’s mercy. A sign that he is still appealing and that people are still responding.

Many years ago, when I was still in the marketplace, my firm brought on a guy that could only be characterized as a “young punk”. He was brash, arrogant and, within six months, had rubbed most everyone the wrong way. Frankly, I wanted nothing to do with him. But one day I walked by his desk and noticed he had an open Bible on it. Not what I was expecting. And I felt like God, in that moment, was telling me to ask him about it. So, I did what any good follower of Christ with a pastor’s heart would do...I ignored it. Fast forward to a few days later, and there’s that Bible again on his desk. This time, the Holy Spirit said, “Ahem, perhaps you didn’t hear me earlier. Ask him about it.” So later that afternoon, he walked by my office, I called him in, and said “Hey, what’s up with that Bible on your desk?” He said, “Kurt, I’ve just become a Christian, and I’m trying to study my Bible. The problem is that the guy who led me to the Lord, who was my spiritual mentor, just moved away for a job. And now I’m kind of lost and spinning because I don’t have anyone to help me.” Ugh...a holy gut punch. It suddenly became clear who

the real jerk was. God had been working on this guy, and I was ready to write him off. Within five minutes we had agreed to start studying the book of John together.

But that's only the beginning. Later that afternoon, another guy walks into my office, says he heard about what me and the first guy are going to do, and says he's new to Dallas and has been looking for something like that because he really wants to dig into the Bible with other men. So he's in. And then the following week, two other guys approach me, say they heard about what we're doing, and that they want in too.

So, in a matter of a week, God gave me four young punks to shepherd. It's wasn't because I was some walking beacon of righteousness, attracting disciples from all over. It was because God was already at work, stirring in these guys' lives, and in his providence, he made a connection between the five of us. By the time I left the firm, 12 different guys had participated in that Bible study and it continued for years after I was gone.

It makes me wonder how many times I've walked past a person God was working on. I know a lot of you joined a Life Group this week. And I bet, for some of you, it didn't take long to identify a person you may not exactly mix well with. But man, can I encourage you to leave your judgments at the door? That may be the very person God has been working on and now he's brought them to your group for you to continue his work. Our God works in the lives of lying Canaanite prostitutes, and he works in the lives of punks. And he is at work right now in the place and in the people he's calling you to. And the beautiful truth in this passage is this: **There is no place God's grace can't reach, and there is no person God's grace can't touch.**

So what do we do with this? I believe our church is at a hinge moment, and I believe every one of us who calls Fellowship Dallas our church home is too, where the collective, and individual, trajectories of our lives are going to change forever. Starting in the spring of 2015, the leadership of this church went on an eighteen-month "spying expedition", to seek the Lord and where he wanted to take our church. That expedition resulted in a good report, one that said we are to call each other to live out our God-given purpose in Christ every day. And just as we discovered God's mission for our church, we want each of us to do that individually.

As we pursue our church's mission, we want to equip you with tools to find and follow your God-given purpose. We want to help you send out your own "spying expedition". Over the course of this series, we are going to include some exercises with your Life Group Discussion Guides. These exercises will allow you to gather your own intelligence about yourself and what God has been up to in your life. It will also help prepare you for a much more in depth journey we'll launch at a future date. This week, in your Life Groups, you're going to receive an exercise called Hinge Moments. We want you to do some reflecting on moments that changed the trajectory of your life, the events that brought you to 'here'. And if you're not in a Life Group, it's not too late. We have midsize groups that meet at church, and those are listed in your Worship Guide. We have home groups that meet throughout the metroplex. Go to the Hub to get some help finding the right group for you.

Because here's where I want all of you to be, and I'll close with this. 40 years before this episode in the history of Israel, 12 spies returned from their expedition, and 10 of them gave such a discouraging report that the nation rebelled, they rejected their inheritance, and God sent them on a four-decade tour of the wilderness to figure it out. And now these two spies return to give a report to Joshua. Would they do it again? No. **[Joshua 2:24a] And they said to Joshua, "Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands."** They now understood why they were 'here', because they saw what God was doing already doing 'there'.

Can I encourage you this morning? Truly the Lord has given...something...into your hands. He's given each of us a unique assignment we call "purpose". God knows right where you are, and God is already at work where he wants to take you. Do you believe it? Will you trust him and take that next step for your life? I pray you do.

It's time to cross the river. Let's get ready to go.