

"An Unlikely Heroine"
Hebrews 11:30-32
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Let's pretend that a few years from now I visit the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. I am strolling down the aisle looking at exhibits of Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Hank Aaron, Cal Ripken Jr., Bert Blyleven, etc. And then, all of a sudden, I come to a big bronze statue with a plaque in front of which says, "Al Jensen, 2nd Base, Chisholm Baptist Church, Softball, Chisholm, MN." I look up and sure enough, the face bears a remarkable resemblance to Al. I think, "What is going on here? Al was a very good softball player, but this is the Baseball Hall of Fame. He doesn't belong here with Derek Jeter and Ken Griffey, Jr. This isn't right."

Well, I don't expect there will ever be an Al Jensen display in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Yet, the shock of seeing one would probably be no greater than the surprise we find in our text today.

This summer we were going through Hebrews 11, and when September came, we switched our focus to "An Ideal Disciple." I was ready to resume our study of the book of Matthew, and just skip the last 10 verses of Hebrews, but I realized the Lord has some important things to say to us in those verses.

We explored the exhibits of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and other great men of faith. And now we come to **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.** Noah, Abraham, Moses, and *Rahab*?? What is a prostitute doing in the Faith Hall of Fame? Yes, many of us remember that she did help out two Israelite spies one time, but is she really a great hero or heroine of faith? It is even more surprising when we look at the context of this verse.

In verses 23-29, the author of Hebrews told us of the great faith demonstrated by Moses, culminating when the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea. Then we read in verse **Hebrews 11:30** **By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.** Again, many of you are familiar with that story, and maybe have sung, "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls came a tumbling down."

Yet, it is a bit surprising that the writer doesn't even mention Joshua, the man who led the Israelites to victory. We read about Rahab in verse 31. And then we have **Hebrews 11:32** **And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.**

What? The writer says he doesn't have time to tell us about David, the great king of Israel, when he just told us about Rahab, the prostitute. That seems like having a bigger exhibit at the Baseball Hall of fame for Al Jensen than for Babe Ruth.

Yet, there is a reason why the God-inspired writer of Hebrews chooses to highlight Rahab's faith. He wants to encourage us in our faith. Recognizing the unique aspects of this woman's trust in the Lord, could strengthen our faith as we seek trust and follow Jesus. Let's pause and pray that would happen this morning.

Let's begin with a quick overview of Rahab's story which is recorded in the Old Testament, the book of Joshua, chapter 2. Forty years after having been led out of Egypt by Moses, the people of Israel are now ready to enter and conquer the promised land of Canaan. Joshua, the leader of Israel, sends two spies to the city of Jericho, one of the main cities of Canaan.

When they arrived in Jericho, **Josua 2:1b** **They went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.** They did not go there for any sexually immoral purpose. Rather, they knew that a prostitute's house was an easy place to be unnoticed in the middle of the city.

Eventually someone figures out that these two men hanging around at Rahab's place, don't belong in Jericho. **Joshua 2:2,3** **The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." 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."**

It looks like it is all over for these two spies. **Josuha 2:4-7** **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. At dusk when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.” (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) 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. As the story continues, the spies agree to spare Rahab and her family when Israel attacks Jericho, and so she helps them escape the city by letting down a rope from her window that was right over the city wall. The spies then return to Joshua and give their report.

Rahab, a pagan prostitute. She is hardly the person we expect to be the rescuer of Israelite spies. But that is what she does. Without her help the spies would have almost certainly perished. Yet, when we read the rest of the Bible, we find Rahab makes another important contribution.

After the fall of Jericho, Rahab and her family live within the nation of Israel. In Matthew 1:5 we learn that she married an Israelite named Salmon and bore a son named Boaz. The reason why Matthew tells us about Rahab’s family is that he is writing a family tree. He reveals that one of Rahab’s descendants is King David, and thus the eventual descendent is Jesus Christ. Rahab, the pagan prostitute, a heathen harlot, friend of Israel, the ancestor of Jesus Christ. Certainly, an unlike hero...(heroine). Why does Rahab end up playing such a significant role in God’s plan?

Well, only God know the answer to that question, but our text does say, she is a woman of faith, who put her faith into action. **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.**

Now, what does it mean when it says, “by faith” Rahab did not perish and gave a friendly welcome to the spies? What does her faith involve? First, Rahab believed the truth about God.

Listen to what she tells the spies, **Joshua 2:9b-11 “I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this county are melting in**

fear because of you. 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. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Folks, that is a pretty sophisticated theological understanding, especially for a pagan prostitute, who very likely was illiterate. How did Rahab come to this understanding? If she were here, Rahab would remind us that faith is a gift from God, that she was a recipient of God’s grace, and that the Lord, not Rahab, deserves all the credit. Yet, I think it is helpful to consider the process God used to enable her to be a woman of faith.

In verse 10, that we just read, Rahab emphasized that she *heard* about what God had done, how He dried up the water of the Red Sea and gave the Israelites victory over the Amorite kings. How this news reached Jericho we are not told.

However, Rahab hears the truth about God, she believes it is accurate and then she takes the second step that so many fail to do. She *ponders* its significance. She realizes that if what she has heard is true, then the God of Israel is not only the God of the Israelites but is the only true God. Or she said in verse **Joshua 2:11b, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.** And thus, she, a pagan prostitute, turns and puts her trust in the one true God. In **Romans 10:17** the apostle Paul says, **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.** In other words, faith comes through hearing the message of the word of God.

Rahab never hear an evangelist recite John 3:16, but when she heard how the Lord had delivered His people from the Egyptians, she heard the word of God. When she heard it, she believed it to be true, and she believed it to be true for her, personally.

The conversion of this pagan prostitute can be a helpful model for us as we seek to share the gospel and make disciples in our increasingly pagan culture. People need to hear the truth about God. We must not be timid in telling others what God has done, especially what He has done for us

through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

People also need to be challenged to respond to the truth. Many folks believe in their heads that God delivered Moses and the Israelites from Egypt, and that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, but who are not trusting in the one true God and in Jesus Christ, His eternal son. We need to remind folks, remind them gently, but with clarity, that believing it happened is not enough. Putting your trust in Jesus Christ is what counts. Rahab was a woman for faith, who put her faith into action. She was a woman who, by choosing to follow the Lord, stands against her entire culture. Though many in Jericho must have heard the accounts of how God had rescued His people. Rahab and her family are the only ones who believed it enough to give their allegiance to that God. These are the only people in the entire city who are spared when Jericho is conquered by Israel.

Now, trusting in the Lord God was not the popular thing to do in Jericho. In fact, it was a very dangerous thing to do. Imagine what would happen to Rahab if the king discovered she had been hiding the spies and lying to him. I'm not sure what means of capital punishment they used in Jericho at that time, but I am pretty sure Rahab would have been executed and she knows that.

Yet, she chooses to go against everything in her background and experience. She goes totally against the grain, trusts the Lord God, and helps the Israelite spies. That is real faith. That is faith in action. That is why in James 2:25 Rahab is used as a model of faith that works. It is no surprise she has an exhibit in the Faith Hall of Fame.

So, what are the lessons God has for us this morning through this text?

#1 No matter who you are, you should trust and obey the Lord. Rahab was a pagan prostitute. Some try to soften the text and suggest Rahab may have simply been an innkeeper, the person who ran the Motel 6 in Jericho. Yet, the Hebrew word makes clear she is a prostitute. And she is not a temple prostitute. She was a woman who sold her body. She would be considered human trash in some circles. Yet, she is a member of the Faith Hall of Fame, and her name is recorded in Matthew 1 as an ancestor of the Messiah.

This reminds us that no matter who we are, what we have done, or how sinful our lives have been, there is room in God's family for us. God was willing to forgive King David, who was guilty of adultery and murder. The Lord was willing to forgive the apostle Paul, who persecuted Christians and had some of them killed. And He is willing to forgive each of us, to forgive you, no matter what sins you have committed. Maybe some of you here this morning are not trusting in Jesus because you don't think it would do any good. You feel certain God can never forgive all the sins you have committed.

Friends, remember, no matter what you have done, no matter how many times you have done it, no matter how ugly your sin is, if you turn to the Lord Jesus, God promises free and full forgiveness. All you need to do is receive His grace, by trusting in Him.

There are people in this community who will not step into this building, or any church, because they don't think they are good enough. They don't believe God could ever forgive them for the nasty things they have done. They don't understand that Christianity, this church, is about God forgiving sinners.

Some people we know need to hear that message. We need to let them know. Some of these folks are very different from you. You might live in a three-bedroom house, but she lives in an old trailer. You might be celebrating 30 years of marriage, but he is on wife number 4. You might stop at the store this afternoon and pick up a 12-pack of diet coke, but he bought \$100 worth of booze at the liquor store last night. Yet, these folks, and so many more like them, need to know about the forgiveness and freedom found in Jesus Christ. I'm not sure what all we should be doing to reach out to these individuals, but I do know that each of us needs to remember that the gospel is for people like Rahab. No matter what someone has done, no matter what someone is like, he/she is certainly not outside of the boundaries of God's grace.

#2 Like Rahab, we need to be women and men of faith who are willing to go against the grain. We need to believe the truth about God, and we need to act upon that truth. We need to stand up for what is good, right, true, and beautiful. We need to do that even if no one else is willing to do so.

That can be scary, but you have to choose. You can either swim upstream against the current of our culture, or you can swim upstream against God Himself. You can follow Jesus and go against what it seems like almost everyone else is doing, or you can follow the culture and go against Jesus. It is probably not a fun or easy choice, but it is clear what the right choice is.

So, how might we be called to go against the grain today? Well, fortunately you don't have to side with an invading army as Rahab did. Yet, there are all sorts of things you ought to be doing to be a man or woman of faith.

Let me mention some of the ways you probably need to be different from others if you are to be faithful to the Lord Jesus. 1 – In our culture people say, "Life is a game where the one with the most toys win." Having a nice house, nice car, nice boat, nice ATV, that is what is important.

To be a person of faith, you need to swim against the current and say, "No. As a servant of Jesus and His kingdom, I will use the money I have to provide for my family, to share with those in need, and to support the Lord's work. Only after that come the toys.

2- In our culture people say, "Life is short, play hard." Being involved and successful in athletics, having fun in lots of recreational activities, that is what is important. As a person of faith, you have to say, "No! Loving God, loving others, and making disciples; that is what is important." And you need to be willing to put aside any activity that keeps you from doing that.

3- In our culture people says, "Everyone has the right to do what they want with their own body." Thus, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, abortion, transgenderism should all be accepted as normal. A person of faith says, "Wrong. Those are sins. That is not how God has called us to live, even if everyone else seems to be doing it."

4- In our culture people say truth is relative. You have to affirm others' beliefs, because all religions are equal. As one student said, "If someone believes in God and another person doesn't believe in God, they may both be right." A person of faith says, "That is nonsense." Jesus said, **John 14:6 I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** He

was either speaking the truth or He was not. If you believe He spoke the truth, then all other religions are false. Faith in Jesus Christ, faith in Jesus alone, is the way to God.

Friends, those are just some of the ways that we, like Rahab, are called to be women and men of faith, for the glory of God. Rahab is an unlikely faith hero(ine). There are other unlikely heroes in the pages of the Bible. There have been many unlikely heroes throughout the history of the church.

John Newton, the wicked slave trader, who became a pastor and hymn writer, the author of "Amazing Grace." C.S. Lewis, an atheist college professor, who became the greatest Christian apologist of the 20th century. Chuck Colson, the powerful White House lawyer who ends up in prison and then becomes a Christian and goes on to be a profound Christian writer and spokesman.

Maybe you have known an unlikely here. One of my Sunday School teachers when I was growing up was a man who really didn't know how to read. Yet, because of his love for God and other people, he had a profound impact on my life.

Friends, no matter who you are, no matter what you have done,
if you are truly a person of faith,
if you trust I Jesus Christ,
if you put your faith into action,
if you are willing to stand up for the Lord,
then God can and will use you.

May the Lord take the people in this room and turn us into a whole group of unlikely faith heroes and heroines.