

## God's Gift Joshua 2:1-24

Our church uses redemptive history as the template to interpret the Scripture. This means the Old and New Testaments demonstrate God's eternal plan to save people and reconcile all things to himself. To understand the smaller stories, we have to remember the larger story and interpret the individual stories in light of the comprehensive redemptive drama.

- 1 – What does this text say about God? – Theological
- 2 – What does this text say about God's work in the world? - Application

In this text

- Our focus moves from Israel, still encamped on the plains of Moab, to the city of Jericho in Canaan.
- Here we meet a woman who, according to the OT, is a notorious sinner but who, in the NT, is commended and included in the genealogy of Jesus. Her account begins when two Hebrew spies enter a Canaanite tavern to gather information.
- Rahab is the tavern's owner who takes the advice Joshua has yet to be spoken but is found in chapter 24 – "*Choose you this day whom you will serve...*" and at the risk of her own life, she trusts in Israel's God and helps the spies in their espionage efforts.
- This is the first example of the fulfilment of the 7<sup>th</sup> part of the Abrahamic covenant -

**Genesis 12:3 – "*in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*"**

- This chapter also serves as a bridge to chapter 6 where the Israelites conquer Jericho.
- In the process, Rahab exercises the courage and strength that God commanded Joshua to have in 1:8
- She becomes the first Gentile believer since Egypt and the first Canaanite believer.
- Her faith as a Gentile proselyte is contrasted with the Hebrew Achan's unfaithfulness in chapter 7.

### **First: Rahab's Faith. 1-7 & 15-16**

As far as we know, Rahab is the first Gentile to receive God's grace since Egypt. It's like finding a diamond in your garbage bin. This is Jericho, in the land of Canaan. The Canaanites have been singled out for destruction by God.

It's surprising that whenever Joshua sends these spies into Jericho (the first city of any great size as they cross the Jordan river from the west) that what they meet is a woman of extraordinary faith! It's totally unexpected. Joshua is writing this great story and the first thing he mentions is a woman, a Gentile and a woman of ill-repute. It's a bit like John's Gospel. The story is only starting when Jesus, walking north through Samaria meets this "shady lady" by a well who engages him in a conversation and who also comes to saving faith.

It is supposed to strike us as strange that of all the citizens of Jericho whom God could have chosen to save from destruction, he didn't choose the kindest grandmother or the sweetest little child, or an innocent baby, but he chose to save someone like Rahab?

Jericho was located in a valley about 10 miles northwest of the Dead Sea at one of the largest freshwater springs in Palestine. Not much is known for sure about the Canaanite people who lived within those walls, but we do know they practiced child sacrifice and prostitutional worship. The Scripture makes one point very clear; Canaanites were terribly evil, so evil that after the city was destroyed Joshua, the Spirit of the Lord moved him to pronounce a curse on anyone who rebuilt it.

*“Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. “At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates” (Joshua 6:26).*

This is the city in which Rahab lived and this is the person that Rahab was until she heard about what God had done in Egypt and in the wilderness.

Luke 18:25-27 - *For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>26</sup> Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?”<sup>27</sup> But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”*

Who can be saved? Anyone who repents of their own gods, including themselves, and instead trusts Jesus can be saved.

And so it is that Rahab’s faith is commended in 2 NT passages:

She is the only woman besides Sarah who is named in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11

*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.*

*James 2:24-25 - You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.<sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?*

Faith alone saves but faith that saves is not alone.

Salvation is not by works but salvation works.

Faith without works is a corpse.

Rahab didn’t just profess God. She practiced her new faith. The spies were trapped within the city and it took extraordinary means to help them escape so as to report back to Joshua. Rahab placed herself, her business and her family in jeopardy to help God’s people.

If she had been found out, she would have been convicted of being a Hebrew convert. Can we be convicted of being Christians?

## Second: The Basis of Rahab's Faith. 8-11

Rahab's salvation is just one example, a microcosm of how God intends to accomplish His purpose through Israel in saving the Gentile world. This is the Old Testament after all, and the first person we meet on the other side of the Jordan is a Gentile who becomes a believer in Jericho of all places!

God had been working in this woman's heart, through the things that she had heard, and the things which these spies now confirmed to her. Before Israel arrived in Canaan, God had already been working there, preparing the way and making possible their success.

In other words, Rahab's faith was based on God's saving actions in Egypt and in the wilderness.

ILL – You may be nervous about witnessing to someone. But Rahab's faith wasn't based on the spies witness but God's work before the spies witness. She just needed to meet an Israelite to say, "I'm with you." God was not only giving the land to Israel, he was also giving Gentiles to Israel.

In the same way, our faith is built on God's work as expressed in the Bible.

*Romans 10:17 - So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

Rahab had heard that God had defeated Pharaoh, Sihon, the Amorite king and Og, king of Bashan = Numbers 21:21-25 – Moses gave their land to Gad.

Moses predicted this just after Israel crossed the Red Sea.

*Exodus 15:15-16 - <sup>15</sup> Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. <sup>16</sup> Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm....*

IMP: Some Christian pastors in America are teaching that we should ignore, virtually divorce ourselves, or as Andy Stanley calls it, "unhitch ourselves" from the OT. But as we learn from these two NT passages, the OT serves as the foundation for the NT. Like Rahab hearing about God's past work in Egypt and the wilderness, the OT is the record on which we pin our faith. Indeed, the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament 855 times—that means about 27% of the New Testament is quotations of the Old Testament!

(See this site for the list: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/pnt/pnt08.cfm>)

There would be no NT if there was no OT  
and the NT cannot be properly interpreted without the OT.

This is important. Everyone in Jericho heard what God had done.

10 & 11 – *For we have heard...As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man...*

This is like **James 2:19** – “*the devils also believe, and tremble.*” but no demon is a Christian.

All of Jericho heard about God but only Rahab confessed God –

11b – *...the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath*

### **Third: The Reward of Rahab’s Faith. 18-23**

There is probably a symbolic connection between the scarlet thread and the shedding of Jesus’ blood. Extending that scarlet cord out the window was like the Israelites placing blood on the lintels of their homes. The house became a safe house in the midst of judgment; like the Ark was in Noah's time and like the cross is for sinners.

And just like in Egypt, any non-Israelite could have come into her home and been safe.

**Joshua 6:17 & 22-23** - *And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, “Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.”<sup>23</sup> So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel.<sup>24</sup> And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it.*

**GOSPEL - Ephesians 2:11-13** - *<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Many years ago, Moses sent 12 spies into the Promised Land but only 2 came back with faith in God. On this occasion, Joshua, who was one of those two spies to return with a positive report, sent only 2 spies. They now return with their report, conforming what God promised and what Moses knew just after they crossed the Red Sea.

**2:23-24** - *They departed and went into the hills and remained there three days until the pursuers returned, and the pursuers searched all along the way and found nothing.<sup>23</sup> Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they told him all that had happened to them.<sup>24</sup> And they said to Joshua, “Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.*

We all weep when we read these verses? Israel could have and should have entered into the Promised Land 45 years earlier.

Our adversaries constantly change but our God remains the same and it is he who gives us the land.

Having been in Jericho, the spies report with great enthusiasm that the LORD has given all the land into our hands. Even more, God's covenant promise concerning Canaan and Moses' prophecy after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea is coming to pass. All the inhabitants of the land melt away because of Israel. These one-time goat-herders have become a great nation, because God has led them to victories over Pharaoh's chariots, the Amelkites, the Amonites and now they were just across the Jordan from Jericho. The people of Jericho knew all about the greatness of Israel's God, and they were terrified.

What will God win today for you?

**Side Note:** Your CG leader has extensive information about Rahab's lie. Was it or was it not justified? Even after an extensive discussion, you may still be unsure.

*"That question is a difficult one for me to answer because it puts me in an ethical conundrum of having to decide whether or not I am "hierarchical ethicist" or a "non-conflicting ethicist" and if you give me a few hours, and preferably a few days, I might be able to give an answer that in some way relieves my conscience from the guilt of having possibly given you the wrong answer."*

- Ligon Duncan

Even after an extensive discussion in your CG, you may still be unsure.

Let me say this -

- 1 – Rahab had just become a believer
- 2 – Faith stumbles
- 3 – If salvation is the new birth then maturity is puberty and her voice was changing
- 4 – Rahab is not the hero of this story
- 5 – The real question and the point of the story is God and his character
- 6 – Unlike Rahab, God never lies and always keeps his promises
- 7 – Don't forget or ignore what you do know and should do at the expense of what you don't know and are unsure about doing
- 8 – In every passage of Scripture, keep the main thing the main thing.

**God's gift** is salvation and salvation is a gift. It is not won by works although it is evidenced by works.

The point is, God doesn't guarantee that the exercise of faith won't get messy. We will be called upon to make decisions in split-seconds and we may well be unable to know what to do. And we will break one of God's commandments because something else is dominating our concern at

that moment: saving our children lives, or someone's honor and integrity. Later we will look back and see that we didn't handle it perfectly: but the intent was a good one.

And one sin...one sin, one little lie, is enough to damn us in hell forever. But this is exactly why Jesus died and why we need to constantly preach the gospel to ourselves. All of our failures press us further into the arms of a perfectly faithful God. All of our sins point us to the sinless One who died for our sins. And this is what we must never forget: God is the only Promise-Keeper. We are all promise breakers. And Christ has promised to keep us even when we break our promises. *"Hallelujah! What a Savior."*

### **Conclusion:**

While we see the land promise about to be realized when Israel enters Canaan, we are also witnessing the blessings of the covenant of grace spill over onto Canaanites such as Rahab and her family. God saves sinners through the blood of Jesus. He did so then and He still does today.

Rahab was not an Israelite. Yet her faith saved her and her family. It also did more than she could have ever dared to dream. It made her part of Jesus's family tree.

*Matthew 1:1-6 - The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. <sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, <sup>3</sup> and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, <sup>4</sup> and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>5</sup> and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, <sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of David the king.*

Rahab was David's great, great grandmother.

(Here's a quick study of the 5 women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy – <https://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/the-good-book-blog/women-in-jesus-genealogy.html>)

Just as Rahab was justified by faith and became an ancestor of Jesus, so you too, can be justified by believing on Jesus and become a descendent of Jesus.

Because Rahab believed God's promise to give Israel the land and deliver her and her family from the day of wrath, she was justified through faith and her sins were forgiven. And because she believed God's promise to save her, she acted and hid the spies at the risk of her own life. Indeed, all those who enter her home with the scarlet thread in the window will be saved from the judgment to come and enter into the land that God gives.

**Invitation:** It's one thing to hear about what God has done; it's another to appropriate that for oneself. Have you?

*There's a land that is fairer than day,  
 And by faith we can see it afar;  
 For the Father waits over the way  
 To prepare us a dwelling place there.*  
 - Sanford Fillmore Bennett

(Sanford Fillmore Bennett was born in Eden, New York, 21 June 1836. He and his parents moved to Plainfield, Illinois when he was two years old. He worked on the farm and attended district school during the winter. He was a voracious reader. At sixteen he entered Waukegon Academy. Two years later he began teaching at Wauconda. In 1858 he entered the University of Michigan. After graduation, he had charge of the schools in Richmond, Illinois. Two years later he resigned and became Associate Editor of the Independent at Elkhorn, Wisconsin. In 1864 he enlisted in the Wisconsin Volunteers and served as Second Lieutenant. After the war he returned to Elkhorn and opened a drug store and began the study of medicine. He graduated from Rush Medical College in 1874.)

### **Band Comes Up**

The point is, God doesn't guarantee that the exercise of faith won't get messy. We will be called upon to make decisions in split-seconds and we may well be unable to know what to do. And we will break one of God's commandments because something else is dominating our concern at that moment: saving our children lives, or someone's honor and integrity. Later we will look back and see that we didn't handle it perfectly: but the intent was a good one. But one sin...one sin, one little lie, is enough to damn us in hell forever.

Yet all of our failures press us further into the arms of a perfectly faithful God. All of our sins point us to the sinless One who died for our sins. And this is what we must never forget: God is the only Promise-Keeper. We are all promise breakers. And Christ has promised to keep us even when we break our promises. That's why we trust in Christ alone and sing -

**Response Song:** In Christ Alone

**For CG Leaders:**

Was Rahab justified in her lie?

This is what many of you want to know. Was Rahab justified in telling this bald-faced lie or not? There's no way around it: it *was* a lie. Is this the Bible's answer to the question that Corrie ten Boom faced: you have hidden some Jews in the attic and the Nazis are at the door asking, "*Do you have any Jews?*" Do you say "Yes" and live with the fact that you turned them in and sealed their death for the rest of your life? Or, do you say "no!" and lie about it, because, well, God understands. Or is there some other option?

In 1804, a split occurred among the Baptists in Kentucky over whether it was right to tell lies to an Indian in order to spare a child's life. Some said, "No," and others said that if it was to spare someone's life, it was permissible. These latter folks were known as the Lying Baptists!

That fact that Rahab lied to further God's purposes has long been fuel for debate among Christian ethicists. The question her actions raise is simply this: *"Is it ever OK to lie to further the purposes of God?"*

Some have answered that question by noting that this was a "lessor of evils" choice. In a fallen and sinful world, there are times when none of the choices before us are good ones and we must decide to do that which is the least sinful. In this case, lying to hide the spies is the lesser evil, with the greater evil being to turn over the spies to the king of Jericho who would have killed them. This is a sort of "situation ethics" proposed by the Lutheran church in general (think about Dietrich Bonhoeffer) and Joseph Fletcher specifically.

Others, like Norman Geisler, have argued for what is called "hierarchicalism," or "non-conflicting hierarchalism" in which there are a hierarchy of ethical absolutes. When situations like this arise, Christians must choose the greater good. In those cases where God's commands seem to conflict with one another, one should choose the greater good, which supersedes the lesser good. So, in this case the greater good was to lie to the king's men to save the spies. This means that Rahab did not actually sin, because the greater good was to save their lives (and possibly her own).

A third view is called "non-conflicting absolutes." John Murray speaks to it in his *Principles of Conduct* and Walter Kaiser hold this view. This view argues that God's commands cannot be set aside even when they seem to conflict. Christians should know that God's commands really don't conflict—despite appearances to the contrary—and it is the Christian's ethical duty is to find some way to act properly without violating any commandment.

It appears that the third view—non-conflicting absolutes— is the one most faithful to the biblical data. But its critics say it is naive and unjustly (or unrealistically) requires Christians to look for ways around desperate situations such as that Rahab faced, when the king's men suddenly show up at her door and ask about the spies. But the fact is God both condemns lying and requires the protection of life. When asked, Rahab could have said nothing, or invited the king's men in to look around—on the assumption that the spies were so well hidden they would not to be found. And even if they were found, not even the martyrdom of the spies and Rahab could have stayed God's hand or thwarted his purposes to give Israel the land of Canaan. Nevertheless, Rahab's lie didn't give her the opportunity to trust God or God the opportunity to work on behalf of the spies and Rahab. Some, who hold this view, have argued that war constitutes a special case and that enemy combatants forfeit the right to truth.

Perhaps the best answer to this problem is Calvin's . . . *"As to [Rahab's] falsehood, we must admit that though it was done for a good purpose, it was not free from fault. For those who hold what is called a dutiful lie, do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God. Therefore, although our purpose, be to assist our brethren, to consult for their safety and relieve them, it never can be lawful to lie, because that cannot be right which is contrary to the nature of God. And God is truth. And still the act of Rahab is not devoid of the praise of virtue, although it was not spotlessly pure. For it often happens that while the saints study to hold the right path, they deviate into circuitous courses."*



Calvin makes a good point. But then again, before Calvin sent men into France as missionaries, these men changed their names and often adopted temporary vocations as a cover to enter France and to protect their lives. Was that a lie?

The point is, God doesn't guarantee that the exercise of faith won't get messy. We will be called upon to make decisions in split-seconds and we may well be unable to know what to do. And we will break one of God's commandments because something else is dominating our concern at that moment: saving our children lives, or someone's honor and integrity. Later we will look back and see that we didn't handle it perfectly: but the intent was a good one. And one sin...one sin, one little lie, is enough to damn us in hell forever. Yet all of our failures press us further into the arms of a perfectly faithful God. All of our sins point us to the sinless One who died for our sins. And this is what we must never forget: God is the only Promise-Keeper. We are all promise breakers. And Christ has promised to keep us even when we break our promises. That's why we trust in Christ alone and sing -

### **CG Leaders:**

Unless the conversation points to the sufficiency of Christ and the assurance of salvation that comes from focusing on the cross, please don't let Rahab's lie dominate your conversation today.

1 – Let's share our testimonies. Give those who will, the opportunity to share how they came to faith in Jesus. Conclude the time with a good word about God's saving grace and its ability to meet us in our various places of life.

2 – What do we know about Rahab?

3 – How is her faith used to encourage Christians in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:24-25?

4 – What specifically did you hear about God that moved you to trust Jesus?

5 – How does knowing that the Holy Spirit precedes your witness, encourage you in witnessing?

6 – What does this text say about God?

7 – How does a text like this move me to trust God?

8 – What has God done, or will God do that we can talk to our friends about when we encourage them to trust Christ as their Savior?

9 – What evidence convicts us of being Christians?

10 – So....what do you think about Rahab's lie?

**Next Sunday:** Joshua 3:1-17 – God Will Give You Dry Ground