

## Meanwhile in the Harlot's House...

Joshua 2:1-24

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Only 18 days ago 53 year old millionaire Michael Marin was sentenced to 16 years in prison. As his verdict was read Michael put his face in his hands and then, while blocking the camera with one hand appeared to swallow something. Seven minutes later he collapsed in convulsions and died.

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Please turn with me to Joshua chapter 2.

Last week we introduced the book of Joshua and looked at the new thing God was planning on doing in and for Israel as He was bringing, the covenant that He had made with Abraham hundreds of years earlier, to fulfillment. He had promised that He would be their God, they would be His people, and He would provide them with a place where He would live among them. Because this covenant was something He was totally responsible for bringing about while this book is called "Joshua" it is really God's story of redemption. So let's continue reading in Joshua chapter 2.

[Read Joshua 2:1-24]

[Pray]

Many characters in the Bible are tied closely with their occupations. If I say "Matthew", you say "tax collector", if I say Paul you say tentmaker. If I say Herod you say king if I say "Peter" you say "fisherman".<sup>1</sup>

There are lots of people in the Bible like this. And that's all good until I say Rahab and you say \_\_\_\_\_ - can you say that in church!

Rahab is an interesting person. She is a woman of faith as we will see; she plays a key role in redemptive history. And yet she is a very minor character in the Bible. She only appears here and then again in chapter six where the actual battle of Jericho takes place, and then she is referred to three times in the New Testament. And the crazy thing with Rahab is that almost every time her name is mentioned it is connected with her occupation.

In this chapter she is called "a *prostitute* named Rahab". In chapter six we get "Rahab the *prostitute*" (Joshua 6:25). And it's the same thing in the New Testament<sup>2</sup> "Prostitute" is almost Rahab's last name. The result today of course is that if you are choosing baby girl names as I was doing not that long ago, Rahab isn't one that makes the short list.

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction adapted from Ray Pritchard's sermon "From Rahab to Jesus" found on <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2009-02-07-From-Rahab-to-Jesus/>

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25

So Rahab is a broken women living on the walls of Jericho mentioned only a couple of times in Scripture. What's the big deal?

The big deal comes in the fact that this woman gets her name into two important passages in the New Testament. Rahab the Prostitute is one of four women named in the lineage of Christ. And she is one of two women to make it into the great chapter of faith in Hebrews 11 along with heroes like Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.

So how can you be both a prostitute and a faith hero at the same time? Today we are going to find out.

And in today's story there are four characters that we are going to follow on our search – Joshua, the spies, the king of Jericho and finally Rahab herself. Each of these characters have a story to tell, but it is in Rahab's story that we get the Gospel.

1.) So let's start with **Joshua** and verse 1.

[Read Joshua 2:1a]

Joshua enters the risky world of espionage. But interestingly it isn't the spying here that was risky but the report the spies might have brought back. Notice what Joshua does. Verse one starts with these words "Then Joshua *secretly* sent two spies..." Secretly... secretly from whom?

As the story goes the spies are immediately identified in Jericho so if that was their goal they failed bitterly. But I don't think it was.

Here the spies are sent out secretly, the emphasis of secrecy being on Israel's end. Why?

Remember Numbers 13?

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites'... So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out" (Numbers 13:1-2)

And that test went very badly. Joshua was one of only two spies who returned with the courage to follow God into the land while the other spies "spread among the Israelites a bad report... [saying] all the people we saw there are of great size.... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." (Numbers 13:32-33) And as a result the whole nation lost faith in God and spent forty years in the desert.

That is a mistake Joshua will not let happen twice. So now, forty years later when Joshua is sending out his own spies, he is careful that he is the only one who knows about it – he sends them out secretly... to Jericho.

Now Jericho as a city, or a town really, had several things about it that made it important.

First, Jericho was just a couple kilometers up from the Dead Sea, and so at 984 feet below sea level was and still is the lowest city on earth. Being so low down and close to the Jordan River meant that it was an incredibly fertile place.

Second, Jericho was an old city; in fact one of the oldest cities on earth dating back close to 10,000 years.<sup>3</sup> As such it was a well established trading post.

And finally, just west of Jericho were three passes through the mountains. If Jericho could be taken then the whole land of Canaan would be unlocked.<sup>4</sup>

And so Joshua secretly sent out the spies to check out Jericho and the land.

2.) And it is **the spies** we are going to follow next:

In response to Joshua's command these two men head out to Jericho. After hiking roughly 25km and swimming across the flooded Jordan River that separated Shittim where Israel was camped from Jericho they finally found themselves face to face with the most advanced defensive technology in the ancient world – walls – walls that Deuteronomy 9 tells us reached up to the sky.

Many Archeologists have been particularly interested in excavating the city of Jericho, and what they have found was that Jericho was built on a small but steep hill and actually had two sets of walls. The main walled part of the city enclosed an area of about six acres housing a little over 1000 people.

But as the city expanded a second set of walls were built lower down that enlarged it to about nine acres.<sup>5</sup> This expansion provided more living space but was steeply sloped. It is suspected that poorer people lived here and it was in a house against this lower wall that Rahab had her home.

Now, just to give you a picture of how secure this city was, in order to break in a person would have to first scale the outer walls. Built out of red clay bricks these 20 foot high and six foot thick walls stood on top of a 15 foot high retaining wall – so 35 feet to scale.

If you managed to get over that, then you would have to climb up a steep hill about 45 feet high at which point you would find yourself in front of the second 20 foot high wall.<sup>6</sup> As such, if you were standing on the outside looking up you would be faced with some 60 feet of vertical red brick – walls up to the sky. Without having access to siege machines Israel faced a humanly impossible task.

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But on the day the spies arrived they found the city open for business.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.atlastours.net/holyland/jericho.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.israel-a-history-of.com/jericho-israel.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/cm/v21/n2/the-walls-of-jericho>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/cm/v21/n2/the-walls-of-jericho>

Look at verse 1

[Read Joshua 2:1b]

As they begin to make their way around the city they found themselves outside the home of Rahab the prostitute.

Hers was a place everyone in the city knew and since lots of traffic made their way through her doors the spies figured this was a good place to spend the night and perhaps go unnoticed. But they were wrong. Verse 2

[Read Joshua 2:2]

In a town of 1000 a couple of nosy neighbors are hard to conceal. Perhaps they had forgotten to take off their “children of Israel” t-shirts before the journey, but whatever the reason they are identified the first night they arrive.

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With the Sheriff knocking on the door this was a time for desperate deals. Look at verse 14

[Read Joshua 2:14]

Now it is true that Rahab has already thrown off the search party, but this is still really quite remarkable. At present these two men are in mortal danger, and for their bargaining chips they offer Rahab life after God gives them the city. But at this point they had no idea how that is going to come about. They have seen the city, more specifically they have seen the walls, and yet they confidently say “God will give us this land”. Now it could be that they wanted to appear more confident than they actually felt in order for their bargaining chips to be worth more, but their words are words of faith are very different from the ten spies who went into the land 40 years earlier. And their faith enabled them to see a reality beyond the walls of the city.

The last thing that needs to be said about the spies is that after escaping they returned to Joshua in verse 24 and gave him the news.

[Read Joshua 2:24]

Their reconnaissance mission had turned up two points of pivotal information. First they had seen the imposing walls of the city, but second they had encountered the hearts of the people.

Now, as far as military intelligence goes, what seems more important? I would have thought the walls were at least worth mentioning, but not these spies. They have forgotten all about them and all their eyes of faith can see is the opportunity God has made. With God on their side the walls are irrelevant.

3.) Here we need to turn briefly to **the King of Jericho** who has just received word that Israel's spies were camped out at Rahab's house. Verses 3

[Read Joshua 2:3]

Now "King of Jericho" is quite a generous way of referring to this guy. Throughout Canaan there were lots of little cities like Jericho and each of them were individually governed by a mayor or mini king. Each of these kings in turn was under the greater control of the super-power Egypt to the south. Of course normally that gave them a sense of security, but in this case it would have only given them dread.

Imagine being the king of a little city and hearing rumors that the great Pharaoh has just had his land obliterated by plagues, lost his whole army in an accident in the Red Sea and allowed a million slaves to just walk out the front door! Israel and their God was getting quite bad publicity.

It's not hard to understand why verse 9 tells us "all who live in this country [were] melting in fear because of [Israel]"

But while everyone in the country was melting the king of Jericho still has hope in his city walls. If destruction was inevitable he may have considered other options, perhaps options like Rahab considered. But God or no God this king figured his best bet was with the city and so verse 7 tells us as soon as he sent out his men to chase down the spies he shut the gates up tight.

In moments of crisis all people reveal where their faith lies and this king's faith lay in the red brick walls he had built up to the sky.

4.)It's here that we come to Rahab – **Rahab the Harlot**.

As I was looking at this story this week I was struck by something, and perhaps you have been struck by it too. Do you find it a bit strange that we have a story about Rahab the harlot in the text at all? It's kind of strange isn't it?

I mean, if I was writing a family history I don't think I would include that my grandmother was a prostitute, that's the first thing. But second, of all the people God could have saved from the city isn't it strange that it wasn't the kind old grandma or the innocent child but Rahab the Prostitute God chose! How did she manage to make the cut?

Now if you are thinking this way you aren't the first to do it. In fact, Josephus, a very reputable first century Jewish historian actually changed Rahab's occupation from prostitute to innkeeper. It just seemed more respectable. But as we have already mentioned the Bible doesn't do this.

Instead every time Rahab gets referred to she is Rahab the Prostitute. And we need to know why.

And as we consider this listen to the faith chapter in Hebrews 11. Verse 31 reads:

“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.” (Hebrews 11:31)

By faith - the prostitute Rahab was saved – by faith. Now if you have been a Christian for long this isn't a new idea for you. It is never those who deserve salvation that get it, but those who have faith that receive God's mercy. And Hebrews 11 tells us Rahab fit that bill. So what did Rahab's faith look like?

In order to see this we need to look at verses 8-11. In these few verses Rahab gives us some very carefully crafted words that tell us where she got her faith and what it was based on. It says:

Before the spies lay down for the night, [Rahab] went up on the roof 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.

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, who you completely destroyed.

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. (Joshua 2:8-11)

So in the first and final section we see parallel thoughts. Rahab says “I know that the LORD (all caps) so YHWH, has given you this land” and then verse 11 closes “for YHWH your God is God.”

These outside brackets are Rahab's personal confession of faith. This is what she believes. And this is already quite remarkable as this goes against everything she had been raised to believe.

Canaan was a pagan nation that had no understanding of YHWH. They were a culture steeped in child sacrifice and sexual fertility rituals. This is what Rahab had grown up with and yet she puts her faith in YHWH while everyone else's melts away.

And here we get the second layer of brackets. Verse 9 tells us “all who live in this country are melting in fear” and verse 11 says “our hearts melted”. Why?

Rahab lives in a pagan land among faithless people who put their trust in a meager sixty foot high wall, no wonder their hearts have melted.

In moments of crisis the gods we have given ourselves over to, gods of pleasure, or health or financial security, melt like wax beside the fire. And for these people, when their gods crumble death seems like the only way out.

But it is here where we get to the center of Rahab’s confession in verse 10.

“We have heard how the Lord...”

Romans 10:17 says “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of [God]”

Rahab and the people of Jericho had heard that YHWH was on the move - a God more powerful than the gods of Egypt, even more powerful than the Red Sea. And yet while all the people heard the same thing they responded differently. Most people’s courage melted as their confidence in their gods crumbled, and yet in spite of seeing the insufficiency of their beliefs they didn’t abandon them – they stuck to their walls – but not Rahab.

Friends, where have you placed your trust? We are people who have heard that God is on the move. Are you taking care of your own future, or have you given your future to God. What about us as a church? Is Fort George a church of faith, or do we have things squarely under our own control?

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Anyone who has as few investments like I do knows that the last couple of years have been tough. For a while I was watching mine shrink every day, after that got too depressing I decided just to check once a week and then I only had a seventh of the pain – much better.

If this is where I had put my trust for my future my heart would have melted under the pressure. When we place our trust in any god besides YHWH it ends up killing us.

Just like it did millionaire Michael Marin. While things started out on the right foot and his god of financial security seemed to be serving him well – protecting him, the successful Wall Street business man was beginning to sink below the surface. As pressure rose in 2009 Marin found he couldn’t pay his monthly 17 thousand dollar mortgage payment. And so, after failing to sell Marin set his home on fire and attempted to collect the insurance.

It was for this fraud that Marin found himself in court on June 28<sup>th</sup> last month. As the jury read the guilty verdict Marin put his face in his hands and swallowed a pill of cyanide.

Any fortress other than YHWH will come crashing down in the end, and with his walls of financial security crumbling he saw no way out but death.

So how did Rahab make it out alive? Here it is in a nutshell.

God specializes in taking people from nowhere to salvation. This is the story of Israel and this is the story of Rahab. Rahab was as low as they come, a woman who sold her body for money.

If you are a sinner out there today this is your story. Rahab knew she was the worst woman in the city but that didn't stop her from seeking salvation in the arms of God.

This is the story of redemption that God has been bringing about from the beginning. Salvation comes to sinners. And actually that's the irony of the great heroes of the faith. Think of it. Adam and Eve saw God and chose fruit. Their son Cain killed his brother. Noah was raped by his son, Abraham chickened out and gave his wife to another man – twice and David murdered and committed adultery. Sin was a major part of all these heroes lives. And so Rahab was a prostitute – big deal!

But these people had another thing in common as well and that was that they chose to let go of the physical walls they could see, walls that promised protection and placed their faith in YHWH as the only source of hope for their future.

And here we find ourselves. Are you a thieving, murdering, adultery committing sinner like these faith heroes – like Rahab? I hope so, because the kingdom of Heaven is made up of people like these. Men and women who did not put their trust in their own righteousness or in their walls of stone or in Michael Marin's case money, but who came to God for salvation.

Let's pray.