

A Model of Faith

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Date: 17 January 2021

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[0 : 00] Our reading is Joshua 2. Joshua chapter 2. Then Joshua, son of Nun, secretly sent two spies from Shittim.

Go, look over the land, he said, especially Jericho. So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. 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. 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 them 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.

[1 : 12] 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.

Before the spies laid down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, 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 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, 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.

Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.

[2 : 29] Our lives for your lives, the men assured her. If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land.

So she let them down by a rope through the window, but the house she lived in was part of the city wall. She said to them, Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you.

Hide yourselves there three days until they return and then go on your way. Now the men had said to her, This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down.

And unless you have brought your father and mother and your brothers and all your family into your house, if any of them go outside of your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads. We will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. If you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.

[3 : 39] Agreed, she replied. Let it be as you say. So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window. When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them.

Then the two men started back. They went out of the hills, forwarded the river and came to Joshua, son of Nun, and told him everything that had happened to them. They said to Joshua, the Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands.

All the people are melting in fear because of us. This is the word of the Lord. So, Joshua, all about the God who saves.

And today we're going to look at Rahab's faith and our faithful God. Now, as a society, we love a good spy story. I don't know if you are one of those, whether it's John le Carré or Robert Ludlum, whether it's Jason Bourne or James Bond.

You can be sure that spy stories will hit the bestseller list, will be a blockbuster movie. And Joshua, too, when we get into it, has that kind of drama, doesn't it? There's a secret mission.

[5 : 01] There's deception. There is Rahab almost as a double agent working against her own people. There are daring escapes recorded. But it's important for us as much as there's a wonderful story.

Joshua is not trying to entertain us. The spies are not the main event. They're not the real heroes of the story. Rather, Joshua wants us to meet Rahab.

And it's really interesting that if the story of Joshua is about the next stage of God's redemption plan, of the people entering into the promised land by conquest, this is an optional story.

It doesn't seem to add anything other than, really importantly, to highlight her faith. And especially, as we'll see, her confession of faith in verse 8 to 14, which is the centre of this chapter.

But again, even Rahab is not the ultimate hero. No, Joshua, as prophet, as preacher, wants us to recognise that the title of hero belongs, as it always does, to God.

[6 : 06] The God who is faithful to his covenant promises, the one who uses his power to save his people, the one who is full of grace to Israel and to those outside of Israel who will put their trust in him.

The story of Rahab is also a story of faith and loyalty that's being tested. Today we're going to focus on Rahab's faith so that we can see more of our God.

But her story, in a sense, is where we will find parallels with ourselves. And if you're following along in the mornings, maybe we'll see a parallel to Peter's letter.

Rahab faces a test of loyalty. Which king will she submit to?

Will it be the king of Jericho or will it be the king of kings? She is in a life or death situation. And she must decide where her allegiance lies.

[7 : 16] Now I want us to think about the fact that every day, as Christians, we have our own tests of loyalty. Will we be loyal and obedient to God in the way that we live and speak and act towards those in our houses?

In our workplace, tests of loyalty. Will we be honest? Will we work with integrity? Will we serve others?

Tests of loyalty in our speech. Will we pass on that piece of gossip? Will we tell that joke even though we know it's not really appropriate?

Our loyalty will be tested over our resources that God has given us. How am I using my time? Is it for myself? Or is it for God and his people?

Is it to serve others in my community? Our money can be a test of loyalty. Will I keep it and spend it and dream of how to spend it?

[8 : 28] Or will I think about how to give sacrificially as the Bible calls us to in light of God's great mercy towards us? To serve the local church and then to serve the wider church?

Tests of loyalty all the time. So how can we pass those tests should be an important question for us. And where is hope for us when we fail those tests?

And the answer to both those questions is to look to God's love for us expressed in the sending of the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's get into our story and let's think about the faith of Rahab.

Let's see first of all faith as loyalty. There is perhaps a surprising switch of focus in the book of Joshua chapter 1. Attention was on Joshua, God's chosen leader.

Chapter 2 in a sense couldn't be much more different. Here the focus is on Rahab and she is foreign and she is immoral and she is from a pagan nation. But nevertheless the spies arrive sent into the land and they stay in what appears to be her home which was a hostel.

[9 : 45] Obviously a public space because word spreads about the arrival of the spies. His word comes to the king of Jericho. Verse 2. Look, some of the Israelites have come to spy out the lands of the king.

Sends messengers. Can we imagine the knock on the door? Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house because they've come to spy out the whole land.

So here's a point of drama. First real moment of tension in the story. What's going to happen next? And we need to recognise this is high risk for Rahab. This is her potentially being guilty of treason.

If she is aiding foreign spies she is engaged in double agent activity. Working within Jericho for the downfall of Jericho. And so Rahab in that moment has to show where her loyalty lies. And what she does she shows new and higher loyalty because she's hidden the spies on the roof and she deceives the men who come. Yeah, they've gone already. You need to go chase after them.

[10:49] Perhaps you know the story of Corrie ten Boom and her family in the Netherlands. They hid German Jews from the Nazis.

They built or had built a secret hiding place within their house. And when explaining why, Corrie said that they answered to a higher authority and they were aiming to protect life against the threat of Hitler and Nazi Germany.

There's parallels. But the point of the drama here isn't for us to consider the ethics of what Rahab did. The Bible wants to draw attention simply to her faith and the strength of her faith.

That's why she's commended in Hebrews 11. And we see our story in Rahab's story in this way.

When we hear the gospel, when we hear the good news that our creator God has so loved a sinful, rebellious world that he has come in the person of his son Jesus.

[12:06] That Jesus has been sent to show the love of God by dying on the cross in the place of sinners. Taking the judgment of God that sinners like us deserve.

Dying and then rising to secure our forgiveness and salvation. That's a call to new allegiance. We are called to submit to Jesus as Lord.

It's a new allegiance because naturally we say I am Lord and King of my life. But now we are called to say Jesus is Lord.

And so like Rahab, we have this point of decision. Do you, do I today bow the knee to Jesus? Do I respond in faith?

And when we respond in faith, the Christian life then is about growing in love and service and obedience to Jesus. And all the while the world wants to squeeze us into its mould.

[13:05] And so there's temptation to give off being loyal to Jesus. The devil wants to tempt us away from faith towards sin.

And our heart becomes a spiritual battleground. And so there is that constant challenge for our faith to stand.

How can faith stand firm? Well that takes us to the heart of this chapter. And to Rahab's new heart. And to her confession of faith. So the confession of faith is what we'll look at now. And we know this is the centre of the story incidentally. Because there's a dramatic pause.

Verse 7. Let's read verse 7. The men set out in pursuit of the spies. And as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. Significance. They're locked in.

[14:02] There's no way out. And that tension doesn't resolve until verse 15. So she let them down by a rope. In between. The gates being shut in the way of escape.

In between. We discover what Rahab believes about God. And how that influences our actions of faith. And one important point is that faith looks to God.

We must not presume when we come to our faith being tested. To presume on our own personal strength. To presume because we've passed previous tests.

That this time we won't fall into temptation. This time we won't fail. Always and every day we must trust in the God who is faithful to his covenant promises. The God who gives grace in our weakness.

The God who is strength sufficient for us. That God who by his spirit is with us and for us. So when it comes to the confession of faith.

[15:05] We see that Rahab has come to discover four truths about God. First in verse 9 we see her understanding of God's promise.

I know that the Lord has given this land to you. This place where Rahab lives. She knows that land has been gifted to Israel by God.

And that's part of the promise that was made to Abraham. Genesis 12, Genesis 15. That was a promise again given to Moses in Exodus 3.

It stands behind the purpose of redemption and rescue from Egypt. That God would take them to this land. To the promised land. And Rahab comes to understand that. And the only way to understand how this new tiny nation of Israel that's never fought in any battles.

Is able to march in victory. Is because of their great God. And his great promises. That he must be faithful to.

[16:07] So she knows about God's promise. She also knows about God's power. Verse 10. So there's two aspects that she's come to hear about by reputation.

God has redeemed his people from Egypt. There's the reference to the Red Sea being dried up and parting. So Israel can walk through safely. And the Egyptians are drowned.

And the enemies of God are being defeated. Sion and Og. People who stand against God and God's will and God's people. They and their nation have also been destroyed.

And the result. Verse 9. People are melting in fear. Verse 11. When we heard it our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed.

This is no ordinary army that Jericho is facing. This is God's army. This is God's power. She also recognises God's majesty.

[17:18] Continuing in verse 11. Everyone's courage failed. Because of you. For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. God is all present and all powerful.

So different from the gods of Egypt and the gods of Canaan. He's not regional and small. And this of course is a key aspect of Old Testament worship. Key aspect of New Testament worship.

Of all true worship of God. There is only one true God. And he has no rivals. And there are no limits to his kingdom or territory.

And he demands exclusive worship. And Rahab understands this. And as she puts those three truths together.

There's one more thing she understands about God. And it's God's mercy. In verse 12 and 13. This is amazing. Now then please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family.

[18:22] Because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother. My brothers and sisters and all who belong to them. And that you will save us from death. Who's Rahab?

Rahab is a pagan outsider. And what's happening? She's seeking. And ultimately she's finding grace from God. Undeserved loving kindness from God.

She claims this covenant of protection. And that brings her into Israelite society. And that brings her under God's covenant love. So those promises made to the people of God.

They'll be her promises too. She appeals to God to be spared. For her family to be spared. And what's she doing? She's making the powerful, promise-keeping, faithful God her only hope.

Spy stories. If you've read them. They often have a tell us what you know scene. Where one group interrogates another. Where on Rahab's case.

[19:26] We have this wonderful, positive testimony of faith that emerges. The heart of her faith. The heart of our faith. Is a God of love.

Seeking to save the lost. Seeking people from all nations. It's a reminder from the Old Testament. Of God's global mission.

That he is building a church from all people. And all nations. And all for his glory. One more thing. I think it's vital that we recognise from Rahab's story.

And I think especially this is a challenge for folks who've been around church for a long time. But maybe not considering themselves Christians.

It's important to recognise that knowing facts is not enough. Faith acts on those facts. Knowing God is real is not enough.

[20:26] Faith makes God our refuge. Those truths that we know, perhaps that we've grown up with for years or decades, need to become truths that we live by.

That they might transform our hearts and our worship. As we think about the story of Rahab in this section and her confession of faith, our minds are drawn to Jesus.

When we come to discover Jesus in the New Testament, we find here is God revealed in his son and he is full of power. Jesus who keeps God's covenant promise, who establishes the new covenant in his body and his blood, sacrificed for his people.

Jesus who shows the mercy of God at the cross, dying in the place of sinners. Jesus who shows us the majesty of God in his resurrection, in his return to glory, in that now he rules and reigns as king of kings.

The example of Rahab teaches us that if we are to pass the test of faith, when our loyalty is tested, how will we remain faithful under pressure?

[21 : 58] We need a high view of Jesus. We need to confess and to believe in God's love expressed to us in Jesus.

To recognise at those points of temptation, at those points of challenge, that knowing Jesus, having the approval of Jesus, receiving honour from Jesus is better than folding and going down that other road.

I just finished John Owen's classic book called On Temptation. A relatively short book and a relatively easy book to get into. If you have the time, I could recommend it.

His basic theme in that book, One, we must watch and pray so that we do not fall into temptation. So we must beware complacency and apathy and drifting from the faith and the God that we confess. And we must cling to the Lord Jesus as our only hope.

[23 : 14] He is the Lord we confess. He is the Lord we run to and cling to in order to live a life of faith. Now, back to the drama at hand and let's see Rahab's faith and action.

Verse 15. Remember, the city gates are shut. So the spies have no way out. The spies really are in Rahab's hands. What happens next?

If this were a spy drama written by Lucari or someone else, the tension heightens again here.

There's two ways it's going to go.

Either Rahab will do the double cross and hand the spies over to the king of Jericho or there's going to be a high-risk escape plan. That's typically how it goes. And here we see the good news, a demonstration of Rahab's faith with the safe escape of the spies from Jericho.

She let them down by a rope through the window and she said to them, go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourself there for three days until they return and then go on your way.

[24 : 28] So they go down by a rope and they follow Rahab's direction. They're kept safe. And back to Rahab's faith, if there's one more act that is important for her, if she is to ensure her salvation, she must stay quiet and not speak about the plans of the spies.

She must, verse 18 and 19, gather her family into her house. Her house becomes a safe house for her family and she must tie that rope outside of her window.

And we know that she does all three. Verse 21, she sent them away and they departed and she tied the scarlet cord in the window. And then we turn to Joshua 6 and the fall of Jericho, we discover Rahab and her family are saved because she tied the cord so they knew where Rahab and her family were.

So Rahab here in this part of our story is now a part of God's church. She has expressed her faith and now her faith is seen in more action.

And it's significant that her loyalty to God leads her to care for God's people at great personal risk to herself, to show concern for God's mission at great risk to herself.

[26 : 03] She understands that Israel against Jericho is not about politics. It's not a power play. It's about God's promise being worked out. It's about the next stage of redemption history.

And she identifies herself with God's people and with God's plans. And the spies are then now her people. They're now her spiritual family.

And so she puts faith in action to protect them. And so very practically for ourselves in a local church, can we find ways to put our faith into action for others in the church?

Perhaps others who have physical needs, practical needs. Perhaps others who need a word of encouragement to keep on going, to persevere.

Perhaps others who need an expression of God's love and kindness. Can we think and pray and act to show our faith? One last thing to say, and this is about faith and encouragement from verses 22 to 24.

[27 : 15] This is the point in the story where the spies return. Again, if you've read any spy stories, crucial to a lot of those plots is of spies going in, a report or a document being smuggled out at high risk, being brought back to headquarters.

And this is often the turning of the tide in the storyline. And in a sense, it's what we see here. The spies come safely back to Joshua. And here's the report that's delivered in verse 24.

The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands. All the people are melting in fear because of us. The Lord has given and melting with fear.

Have we heard that somewhere before? We have, haven't we? We've heard this in Rahab's own words. This report comes straight from Rahab's mouth.

That is to say, Rahab's faith has encouraged the spies' faith in God's promises. meeting Rahab, they have been encouraged by God's saving power.

[28 : 23] They now know for sure God will do as he promised. And again, for us as a church, do we value this aspect of fellowship?

That the faith of others when we feel weak can keep us walking in faith and loyalty? Think about this coming week. We have a chance tomorrow night on a Monday to pray together.

Now you might feel tired or you might feel awkward or you might feel life has been busy. You just might not fancy it. But if you come, I can guarantee that you will be encouraged to hear your brothers and your sisters pray for God's glory and for God's church.

Community group on Wednesday. You might feel rubbish and out of sorts and the day's been hard, the week's been hard. Again, you might not fancy it, but I can guarantee you that if you show up, God will encourage you as your brothers and sisters are speaking the truth to one another from God's word as they're praying for one another and for you.

We need others sometimes to strengthen our faith when we feel weak. And it's also important for us to see again, and we've been seeing it in 1 Peter, that faith has this future look to it.

[29 : 47] Here come the spies and they're full of faith. The Lord has surely given the land into our hands. For them, their faith would be reaching its goal at the promised land and they were confident in God.

For us, our faith, our future is eternal glory. It's the new heavens and the new earth. It's being with Jesus, our Lord, forever. Do we have faith that God's promise in Jesus will never fail?

Do we recognise that we can trust him? When Jesus cried out on the cross, it is finished. He made the plan of salvation was finished. So by faith, our future is secure because our salvation is secure. This is Joshua's powerful sermon. Joshua means God saves. Joshua was the author and Joshua, God saves, is the title.

And we get a beautiful picture of God's salvation in the life of Reha, a beautiful picture of the gospel. Here is God's powerful love that comes to a pagan outsider, someone known for wild and moral living, but God's grace finds her.

[30 : 55] It leads to a changed heart and changed loyalty. It leads to actions that show that God is her Lord. And she helps and encourages the faith of others. And we can learn from Rahab that if we want a faith that stands up to interrogation and opposition, challenges to loyalty in Jesus, we need a faith that sees and submits to Jesus as Lord, powerful, promise-keeping, majestic, merciful Lord Jesus, that we would make him our rock and our refuge.

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