

Overflowing Grace

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[0 : 00] The couple who are involved with the church plant in Kinsale, I'll leave it at the back there, but it's just a thank you to express their thanks for our support to them in many different ways in their work in their church plant there in Kinsale.

So that's from Craig and Heather. I'll leave it at the back and you can have a read of it afterwards. Thank you, Cherry. Sorry. No, no, just the door.

No, she can come back, honestly. It was just the door. So Joshua chapter 2. Let's pray and ask for God's help.

Amen. Our Father God, we thank you so much for these amazing stories which have been recorded for us, kept preserved over many hundreds and thousands of years.

So that we today can read them. And we pray that they would speak to us afresh, telling us and reminding us of the great God that you are.

[1 : 31] The God who has come to change us and transform us. And we pray, Father, that we would meet the God who met with Rahab.

And that we would experience the same things that she experienced. That our lives would be changed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. When I was little, one of my favorite stories to listen to was called The Magic Porridge Pot. Any of you ever read that? Yeah? You remember it? Some of the older people might know it. Well, for those of you who don't know the story, it's about a little girl and her mum who are very poor. They have no money and they're in hard times and can't buy any food. So the little girl goes off into the woods to buy or to find some mushrooms and wild berries.

[2 : 33] And while she's out in the woods, she meets an old lady who gives her a magic porridge pot. The pot came with two rules. By simply saying, cook, little pot, cook, the magic pot would go on making porridge.

And by saying, stop, little pot, stop, the magic pot would stop making porridge. And one day, as the story goes, the little girl goes off to visit her grandmother.

And the mum at home decides to make some porridge. So she puts the pot on top of the stove and she says, cook, little pot, cook. But the problem is she can't remember the words to stop it.

This is how the story goes. No more now, little pot. But it kept making porridge. That's it, little pot, stop. But the porridge started to overflow from the pot and spill onto the stove.

Stop it, she cried. But the porridge overflowed onto the floor and it filled the kitchen. It poured out into the street and then into the next house.

[3 : 40] Then it poured through every street in the town and no one knew how to stop it. People came with buckets and pots to scoop it up, scoop up the porridge.

But as fast as they did, more and more porridge filled the streets. You'll have to go out and buy it to find out the rest of the story. But in Joshua chapter 2, we don't have anybody cooking porridge. But we do have overflowing grace. Grace is God's generous favor whereby he welcomes and accepts undeserving rebels like you and me.

God's grace begins to flow through the streets of Jericho. Up until this point of the Bible story, it seems as if God's grace is limited to the people of Israel.

But that was never God's intention. God's grace came to Israel so that it would overflow from one nation to all the other nations.

[4 : 48] Do you remember the promise that God made to Abraham back at the very beginning? You can read it in Genesis 12 and 15. He says, you will become a great nation.

You will have your own place to live. And all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you, through your family. In other words, God's grace would overflow from those people to the people of

the world.

And as much as we would like to shout, stop, it just keeps on flowing. No one and nothing can stop the overflow of God's grace.

That's the message of Joshua chapter 2. Well, let's dig a little deeper and find out how that's so. First of all, the inclusiveness of God's grace.

Remember, the whole nation of Israel are camped on the east side of the Jordan River. On the other side of the river lies the city of Jericho.

[5 : 58] Verse 1. Then Joshua, son of Nun, secretly sent two spies from Shittim. Go look over the land, he said, especially Jericho.

Go check it out. Go see what's going on there. What are their armies doing? What way can we penetrate? Now, while Joshua is concerned about the lie of the land, God is concerned about the spread of his grace towards people.

The rest of verse 1. And so the spies went and entered the house of a prostitute, a brothel, to a woman named Rahab.

And they stayed there. Now, from the point of this story forwards, it all focuses around this rather dubious woman called Rahab.

Verse 2. The king of Jericho was told, look, some of the Israelites came here tonight to spy out the land. So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab.

[7 : 04] Bring out those men who have come here 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, the men left. I don't know which way they went.

Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them. But Rahab had taken them up onto 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, leaving the spies still at Rahab's house.

Now the moral of the story here is not to go and do likewise, because Rahab was telling big fat porkies, wasn't she?

[8 : 06] A lot of lies were going on here. So it doesn't mean to say it's okay to tell lies. Now I think what's going on here is that it's introducing us to the people that God longs to welcome in.

It's introducing us to this woman, Rahab. Now there seems to be three reasons why first readers of this story would consider Rahab to be excluded from God's grace.

First of all, she's a woman. Women in that culture were thought of as nobodies, second class citizens, not much better than the animals out in the pen.

That's the way they were treated. Secondly, she was a prostitute, a lifestyle that was worthy of stoning. And third, Rahab is a pagan.

She didn't worship God, but she served most likely at the local temple fertility shrine, basically offering sex to evoke the blessings of the gods on the people.

[9 : 14] So on all three counts, socially a woman, morally a prostitute, spiritually a pagan, Rahab ought to be excluded from God's grace.

In fact, later on in Jewish culture, we learned that the first prayer that the Jew would pray, the Jewish man would pray, went like this.

The first prayer in the morning, he'd wake up and he'd say, I thank you God that I am not born a Gentile. I thank you God that I am not born a woman. And I thank you that I am not born a slave. Rahab was all three, wasn't she? A pagan Gentile, an outsider. She was a woman, an outcast, a sex slave.

But yet, as we will see, Rahab was included. She was welcomed into the community of God's people. So this story is not so much about spies checking out the lie of the land.

[10 : 20] It's more about a story where we're checking out God's grace. But that's not the end of Rahab. You see, I think stories here are written to remind us of God's desire to welcome and accept the outsider.

From Joshua onward, Rahab goes off the radar. We don't hear much about her until we start looking back into the family tree of God's son, Jesus Christ.

Hold your finger in Joshua and jump all the way to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 1. It's on page 965. Matthew, chapter 1.

Rahab turns up in Joshua 2. We don't hear much more of her. And then she turns up in Matthew, chapter 1.

Look at verse 1. It says, A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. This is the whole family line of Jesus before us. And there's some pretty famous people in here.

[11:32] Verse 2. Abraham, the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah, and his 12 sons that we're actually reading about as they go into the Promised Land.

So they're big, important people. And then we get down to verse 5 and we read of Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Rahab, we're told there, had a son called Boaz. And Boaz later had a family. He was married to Ruth, by the way, another great story.

And they had a family and so on, all the way down through the generations, until we come to a young teenage girl called Mary. Look at verse 21. Where we're told that she will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

And your notes at the bottom of the Bible, there's a little letter there. And you'll see the note at the bottom there. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means the Lord saves.

[12:39] Because he will save his people from their sins. Rahab was used by God to bring in Jesus Christ.

Without Rahab, we would never get to Jesus. Don't you think that it's ironic that Rahab, who we might exclude, who we would write out of the story, is the vital link to the main character.

To the centerpiece of the whole story. The one that we would reject, the one that we would consider not suitable, is welcomed in by God to bring about the birth of his son, Jesus Christ, so that God's grace would overflow to the whole world.

That is the inclusive nature of God's grace. Now God's grace is amazing because, like Rahab, we all desperately need God's grace.

You see, as God's grace begins to flow out towards the nations, he also begins to deal with the nations. As Israel moved towards the promised land, so God was beginning to confront the nations with who he is.

[14:13] Look back to Genesis chapter 15. Genesis chapter 15.

In that chapter we read about God giving promises to Abraham about the land, about him becoming a great nation. But he also says this in verse 16 of chapter 15.

Abraham is presently in the promised land. This is hundreds of years before. And God is promising him that the land where he is, that that will one day belong to all his family.

But he says in verse 16, In the fourth generation, your descendants will come back here. For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

God has not only made promises to give them rest, but he has also made a promise that he is going to come back and he's going to judge the Amorite people. Now when we get to Joshua, 600 years later, Abraham's descendants are now under the leadership of Joshua and are camped on the edge of Jericho, the Amorite people.

[15:43] They're on the edge of the promised land that God had given to them. And for 600 years, the people of Jericho, the Amorites, have been living as they wanted, rejecting God and rebelling against God.

As it said in Genesis 15, 16, their sins were mounting up to their full measure. Year after year, it was just getting worse and worse and worse. And now God is moving against them.

Well, you say, maybe they never heard about God. Maybe it's not fair that God is going to judge them. Maybe they didn't know about God. Well, they did know about God.

Back in Joshua chapter 2, verse 8, Before the spies lay down on the night, Rahab went up on the roof and she 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 are melting in fear because of you.

So it wasn't just Rahab who had heard about God. The whole city knew about God and what he had promised. Look at verse 10. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt.

[17:09] That great big story when the people were let go from Egypt and they came to the Red Sea and the waters parted and Israel marched through on dry land. They got through safely to the

other side and when the Egyptians followed, the waters came crashing back down on them.

Jericho heard all about that. The rest of verse 10. And they heard about what you did to Zion and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you had completely destroyed.

As they came round to the River Jordan, they came across these two kings and they said, let us pass through. God has given us this land.

If you let us through, nothing will happen to you. But they refused to let them by and they were completely destroyed. It was all over the local news in Jericho.

Facebook and Twitter were bouncing with stories of what had happened to the nations as they tried to stand in God's way. Anyone with an ounce of sense would have turned in repentance to God.

[18:20] They were a rebellious people and God was moving in judgment towards Jericho. And we knew how they feel.

Look at verse 11. When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is God in heaven, above and on the earth below.

There's no other God. We do have our own little gods, but they're nothing. This is the one and true God. They knew who he was and they knew that judgment wasn't far behind.

So how were Jericho going to respond? Well, we know how Rahab would respond and we'll find out how the rest of the city responded in chapter 5 later on.

But I think it reminds us, doesn't it, that God takes sin seriously. He can't let the people and the nations of the world carry on as they wish, wrecking their own lives and destroying everybody else's.

[19:26] He gives the nations warning. In this case for Jericho, there were 600 years that they had to respond to God's grace. It wasn't like God woke up one morning after a bad night and he had a sore head and he decided to let it all out on poor Jericho.

No, it was his reasoned and his just and fair response to a rebellious people. God had been entirely gracious to them. Now hundreds of years later, the warning still sounds to us today.

And that's why we all need God's grace. Because what we see happening here to Jericho is only a picture of what will happen on a universal scale.

As we begin to move through the Bible story, the judgment of God moves from the local and the temporary, what would happen to Jericho and just for the nation or just for a generation, as we move through the Bible, it moves to the global and the eternal.

God's judgment isn't just in a little place and just for a little bit of time. It goes globally and it's for an eternity. What God said to Jericho, he is now saying to the world.

[20:46] And what God did to Jericho, he will do to everyone who refuses to turn to him and who rejects his grace.

Whoever we are, we are all desperately needing God's intervening grace to save rebellious people like us from his coming judgment.

Well, the wonder of God's grace is not only that he is patient, giving people lots and lots of time, but that he has made his grace available and we can receive it.

Look at how Rahab responds to God's grace in verse 12. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you.

The word kindness there is about God's faithful covenant or promised love. It's a love that's dependent not on us, but it's entirely dependent upon God.

[22:01] It's a promised love so that God remains faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to him. That's what kindness means. And so here Rahab in verse 12, it's like she's throwing herself completely into the faithful, loving arms of God.

She's entrusting herself into God's kindness. Give your kindness to me. It's an act of faith. It's a means of trust as the story shows.

Look at the rest of verse 12. Give me a sure sign, she says, that you will spare the lives of my father and mother and my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them and that you will save us from death.

Well, what would the sign be? Verse 14. Our lives for your lives, the man assured us. We will put our lives on the line. Death itself will make sure that this promise will remain.

Verse 17. So the men 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.

[23 : 20] Verse 21. Agreed, Rahab replied. Let it be as you say. So she went away and they departed and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

Now I want us to notice that Rahab doesn't have to do anything. All she, she doesn't have to kind of like go to church. She's not asked to read her Bible.

She's not asked to do anything. All she does is tie this scarlet cord in the window which is an act of faith in what God has promised to do.

God has promised to save her, to rescue her. And so all she does is tie this ribbon in the window as an act of faith because the salvation of Rahab is not based on her social, moral or spiritual condition.

It's all based on God's promise towards her. And that promise becomes effective to her as she trusts in what God is going to do. And this faith leads to the protection for herself and for her whole family.

[24 : 33] Go back again to verse 12. She says, 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, that you will save us from death.

Rahab longs that God's grace would flow not just to her, not that she would just be the only privileged one, but that it would extend to her whole family.

And so we're left with the question, is God so generous that he would move not just to Rahab? Would he also include everybody else? Well, look at verse 17.

The men 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, your brothers, and all your family into the house.

If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head. We will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on your head if a hand is laid on him.

[25 : 45] The promise is made that if they too come into the house, if her mum and her dad and her brothers and her sisters and all their wives and husbands and all of their children and all the grandchildren, if they all come under the shelter of the house, the house that God has promised to protect, they would all be kept safe when Israel march against Jericho.

Would God do it? Would he really save them? Well, have a look at chapter 6, verse 22. This is after Israel have gone up against Jericho.

Joshua chapter 6, verse 22. Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her in accordance with your oath to her. So the young men who had gone, so the young men who had done the spying went in and bought out Rahab, her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her.

And they brought her and her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel, a place of safety. Can you see the generous, overflowing, protective grace of God?

[27 : 32] You get the sense here that there was so much grace available that everybody who would trust in the promise of God, they could be in there and be kept safe.

That was the nature of God's grace. It overflows. It can't be contained. It can't be stopped. It's overflowing through the streets of Jericho, through the family.

And it was there for all who would trust in Him. Amen. The story of God's overflowing grace doesn't stop there.

The house of refuge for Rahab and her family is not really big enough for the world, is it? We need something much bigger than a house.

And in His determination to keep His grace flowing to the world, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, through Rahab as we learned. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross, the place where all who will trust in Him will find shelter and refuge from the ultimate coming judgment.

[28 : 53] The cross stands across history, across time. It stands across the nations. The shadow of the cross falls across the world, welcoming outsiders, welcoming people who are socially and morally and spiritually broken.

And He says, come to me, come into my family and you will be safe. But it doesn't stop there.

Because all those who come into His family are brought together to be called God's church, His people. And the church, His people, is to be an overflow of His grace.

As we are here together this morning, we are a new community of people who have been welcomed in by God, who are here to welcome one another. We are to offer as a church family a refuge for the broken.

We are to take in the outsider. We are to proclaim the message of God that His grace is always greater than our sin. There is nobody who is outside the bounds of God's grace in terms of people who God can reach.

[30 : 08] Rahab is presented here in this story as one who is socially, morally, and spiritually completely outside. If God would do that for her, He will do it for anyone.

And we are to be a community of grace that would bring that grace to the world in which we live. That it would overflow from our lives.

That it would bubble out into our communities. That it would begin to flow through the streets of Carragalline. That it would begin to flow into every home in Ireland. And that we would be people that some here would even go and bring that grace to the world.

Because there is nothing that is ever going to stop the overflow of God's grace. He has welcomed us in. And He sends us today to welcome others in.

Into His amazing love. Let's pray together. Our Father God, we want to thank You so much for Your generosity, for Your amazing favor, for Your kindness.

[31 : 34] While like Jericho, we deserve, we deserve judgment because of our rebellion, because of our sin. But yet, You have sent Your Son and under the cross of Christ, we find protection, we find shelter and refuge.

We find a home. We find peace and security. We find a Father who loves us. A Father who will always accept us.

A Father who will never turn His back on us. A Father who will give to us all that we ever need. And it is our prayer that we would be people who would welcome others into Your family.

Father, help us to be overflowing with Your grace. Fill us afresh with Your grace every day so that we would bubble over, that the streets in Carigaline, the homes in this nation would be filled with Your grace.

Pour out Your Spirit and make it happen. In Jesus' name. Amen.