

Joshua 2

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Date: 10 July 2022

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[0 : 01] Again, the scripture text is chapter 2 of Joshua. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. And Joshua, the son of Nun, sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, Go, view the land, especially Jericho.

And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. And it was told to the king of Jericho, Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.

Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land. But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them.

And she said, True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went.

Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of the flax that she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords, and the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

[1 : 14] Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.

And the men said to her, Our life for yours, even to death. If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land, we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.

[2 : 24] Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. And she said to them, Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned.

Then afterward you may go your way. The men said to her, We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers and all your father's household.

Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head.

But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear. And she said, According to your words, so be it. Then she sent them away, and they departed, and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

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. Then the two men returned.

[3 : 37] 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. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

Great to have you here on this beautiful summer day. As we continue now getting into the book of Joshua, which will take us through the first Sunday in October.

So with much of our church family on the road and dispersed to the far corners of the world, as often as you're able to be here, we're going to be right here in this wonderful book.

And what a story that you've just heard read to you this morning. I mean, really, what a story. And Rahab, this splendid cinematic figure, a woman of the world, yes, but one who takes amazing risks and as a consequence, finds reward in the world, taking risks, finding reward.

[5 : 16] And I just want to say at the outset, it's a true story, which makes it all the more wonderful to read. We put our children to bed over the years, telling once upon the time stories, but this is a true story that has great significance for your story.

It's a story about life and death, and it will have implications for your life and your death. And the first thing we notice about her story is that her story is set within a larger story.

This was the first observation I saw in the middle of the week while looking at the text, and it surprised me. I anticipated that it would both begin and end with Rahab, but Rahab's meaning is wrapped in Joshua-like matters.

Can I show it to you? Take a look at the opening verse. It starts with Joshua, who will disappear quickly from the text, but Joshua, the son of Nun, sent two spies secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, go view the land, especially Jericho, and they went and came into the house.

And only then do we meet Rahab. Look at the back end of the story. He returns, verses 23 and 24, along with those two spies.

[6 : 43] Then the two men returned, and 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. 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.

Joshua stands as the bookends in which Rahab is wrapped. What are we to make of this? By the subtlest of literary means is the writer conveying to us that Rahab's story, as grand as it is, and as often as it ought to be retold, bears larger significance in relationship to the Bible's even bigger story.

Is that what we're to read? Are we meant to read Rahab by what is revealed to us about Joshua? And remember, Joshua means God saves.

Is God saves standing on either end of the text significant in regard to what happens in and through and for Joshua.

And if so, if so, if this beautiful, splendid woman of the scriptures is put before the church today with such glorious color as to demonstrate that what happens in her is embedded in what God is doing in his Savior King, then her story has implications for your story.

[8 : 23] Yes. The treasures of her life can be deployed by you in your life. And the reward and the risk that we will see here today ought to govern the way in which we live our very lives.

I'm going to spend just a few moments this morning in the text in the sense of listening to Rahab's story. I want to listen to the story because it came to us in the form of the story.

I'm not going to reread it, but I want us to listen attentively to it. All for the purpose, really, of seeing on the backside what we can learn from it.

So let's listen that we might learn. Verses two and three, we enter into Rahab's world. She's a prostitute.

She lodged there. Probably had a house of sorts, maybe even a place where travelers would stay in the ancient world along their journeys and on the way.

[9 : 36] Something to eat, a bed to sleep in. And she was there living out her life. This was her world.

But not only do we see that she was a prostitute overseeing a home in her world where travelers would normally come through, we also see that her world was filled with people who opposed Israel's God.

I mean, that's what comes up immediately. And it was told to the king of Jericho, behold, the men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land. Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab saying, bring out the men who have come to you who have entered your house for they have come

to search out all the land.

The world in which Rahab lived was well acquainted with the worldliness in which you and I know and live.

And it was also like ours in that opposition emerges against the God of Israel. In every city, there would be small rulers, mayors, king-like creatures who rule their domain for their own welfare.

[10:57] We've already seen this in Joshua. Go back to the first week that they were taking over the land of those who had rebelled against God and stolen all that was his.

And so now God is returning through Joshua, his savior, to restore and to reclaim what was his from the outset at the beginning of creation. And there is, in one sense, a rebelliousness in the world that will resist the rule of God and his appointed leader.

It's like reading like a very modern story. Such was her world. The risks, though, really begin moving from verses 4 through 13.

The risks are seen in two fundamental ways. She is going to shelter them and she is going to make a speech unto them.

Shelter she offers and speech she makes. Look at this sheltering risk in verses 4 to 7.

[12:16] She had taken them, hid them among the flax. In other words, she had received them. She welcomed them. She hid them.

She lied for them. All at the risk of those who were controlling the world in which she lived. I mean, they could shut down her license in a minute. More than that, they could probably do worse things to her.

And yet she took these risks. She received the enemy of God. Of her God. She kindly welcomed them.

She willingly hid them. She probably easily lied for them. As we're listening to the story, we're observing simply in all those actions that she did something.

That's what risk is. She did something. She took a risk of the most unusual kind.

[13:33] In a bit, I'm going to return to this risk of doing. We need to learn from her doing. But notice first, offering shelter wasn't the only form of risk she took.

Verses 8 to 13, I've come to think of as the really heightened aspect of the risk Rahab took. It's not the shelter she offers, it's the speech she makes.

Notice, right there in the story, the center of the story, there is a speech given, and it's by Rahab. And in this speech, she will declare her outright allegiance to them and to their God.

So get it. Verses 4 to 7, she offers shelter in the sense she demonstrates empathy toward them, but in 8 to 13, she secures her allegiance to them.

It's one thing to say, I was trying to help someone who was in trouble if the authorities would come. It's another thing to say, I am blatantly, wholeheartedly with you and not with the authorities who would have come.

[14:48] I am, she says, the enemy within my own world. Suddenly, for her, on this day, for the first time, within her own home.

the enemy of all that she had once known. She is now beginning to separate herself from the world in which she lives, filled with all of its accoutrements and delights in order to provide for others and to secure her allegiance to them.

This is an amazing speech. I just want to highlight three aspects of it. You can look at it yourself. I don't plan on rereading all of 8 to 13, but know this.

She basically says to them, we have already heard of you and your God. We know something of you.

Implication, and we know that your God is coming for us. This is quite an astonishing thing for anyone in our world to actually admit that those who proclaim the truths of the scriptures fulfilled in the promises made to Israel actually indicate that not only is there such a savior king who comes to rule and to reclaim all that is his and all peoples to the ends of the earth, but that he's coming for you if you continue to stand against him.

[16:23] she says, we know that your God comes for us. Secondly, she says, and you probably saw it three or four times in the text, I mean, this is the words that the spies will parrot back when they return to Joshua.

Our hearts are already like melted wax before you. I mean, this is the kind of reconnaissance intelligence that these two spies must have loved.

Not only have they heard of us, they are deflated. They are of low morale before anything else. And I've often thought of Joshua himself only sending two rather than 12.

You know, 40 years before, he was part of a mission of 12 who went behind the lines to see the state of the Union and when he returned, he said, let's go along with Caleb.

But the other 10 came back and said, I don't think we can go. They're big, they're strong, they're ready, we can't win. But now he sends two because he knows all I need is two and these two return and say, their hearts are melted like wax before us.

[17 : 32] They are done. We haven't even gotten out of the locker room, we haven't even walked onto the court, we haven't even gone through warm-ups and we have already won. We've heard of you.

We know that God is coming for us. Our hearts are melted like wax before you. We already know that this God you proclaim will conquer us.

And with that wonderful confession, she now moves to the moment of the speech that should be read again.

the end of verse 12. He is God in the heavens above and the earth beneath.

Now, then, please swear to me by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them and deliver our lives from death.

[19 : 02] This is Rahab's majestic plea. I know I live in a world where I'm not walking rightly.

Admit it. I know I live in a world where I fear all of those who might rule against me if I were to go in your direction.

It would be quite costly. I'm willing to take a risk because I know that your God is true and right and just and will win over me.

Therefore, as a dead woman I now speak, please save me. As one marked out for God's judgment, give me mercy.

Because I have so inclined through an opening in my heart to be tender toward the ways of your God. May your God therefore now be tender toward me.

[20 : 11] This is a softening of the heart to say I now stand with you rather than lie with them. I will stand with the children of the promise.

What a speech. What a risk. love. Not mere empathy. Absolute allegiance and a cry for mercy.

And notice this. I love this. I fully expected her in those verses to say something of herself first, but she does not.

Now then, please swear to me, verse 12, by the Lord, that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will do kindly with me. No, no, no. With my father and my mother, with my brothers and my sisters, and with all who go with them.

Save our life. She only comes in at the end. Her plea is collective. As soon as the heart begins to consider the ways of God, her heart moved beyond herself to those that she loved.

[21 : 29] The others that she knew were likewise marked out for judgment. What a wonderful woman.

Just doesn't want her own life. We got to bring others with us. As we listen to this part of her story, we're observing that her risk was not limited to doing something, but also saying something.

And this makes me wonder, what should we be learning from all that she is doing and all that she is saying? Well, we'll get to there in a minute. Hang on. Listen a little bit further to the story because it came to you in the form of a story, not some principle lesson.

She moves from her world early in the text to the risks in the middle of the text to her reward at the latter end of the text, verses 14 to 22.

I take verse 14 to be the climactic moment in the story. If it were a movie, this is the line we would have remembered.

[22 : 46] for all of her speech and the heightened aspect of the tension suddenly from the men who are now fearing for their own lives, you get this line, our life for yours, even unto death, she has now won their allegiance to herself.

Remember, she asked them to swear to her. The spies have looked at her risks and they offer her a way out and the way out is their oath.

Our life for yours, even unto death, or verse 17. This oath that we have sworn, or even later in the text, in verse 20, the oath that you made us swear, the oath, the oath, the oath, she has now in her

heart, the promise of salvation granted to her, not by Joshua, but by the very fact that they were his emissaries, that she would receive God's mercy because she responded to the word of his messengers.

Oh, I need to say that one more time. The people received mercy from God, not because they listened to Joshua, but to those who announced his name and his mercy and steadfast love. It's an oath. However, it's one that required a sign. interwoven in that last section in that emphasis of their oath are all the bits that make the story worthy of something on the big screen.

[24 : 47] I mean, you get the fact that her home is in a wall. You know, a few years ago, many of you know one of my mentors, Dick Lucas, he's a minister in England, and I went over on his 94th birthday.

I know you're thinking I'm getting old as well, but at any rate, we were there, and we drove down to where he did his first curacy. Then we drove from there to where he went to boarding school. Then we drove over to the home that he had, and it's all down on those white sand beaches, those big tall walls on the south side of England, and the beaches of, in a sense, where William the Conqueror came in like 1066, and he shows me his house, and he shows me his home, and it's a brick home, and it's actually his, the wall of his home is built into the wall of the Roman keep, and from his boyhood window, he would have been able to look over the fields where the Battle of Hastings took place, in which the modern world, as we know it, all originated.

No wonder I thought this man is a traditionalist. He comes from the very soil of where the modern world came, and his home is embedded in the wall, and from his window, one could rappel down into the slopes beneath, and so this woman, too, in the city of Jericho, had a home that was evidently in the wall, and from the wall, the men might escape even without ever having to leave or go out a gate.

It was brilliant. They walked into the best home they could have possibly picked. didn't have to go outside to get out. I love all the details in the story.

[26 : 33] Her thread in the wind. You can just see it, can't you? Believe me, she didn't roll that thing up at night, take it back in the window, because she didn't know when they were coming.

That thing just hung and swung as a sign that they might pay attention, to the oath that their king who cometh would have mercy.

I even love her advice to the spies. Not only does she protect them when they first came, she now provides all the provision necessary for them to escape.

And then and only then does Rahab walk off the stage. Well, we'll see her in a few weeks. And we'll return to where the story began. Joshua and the two spies.

I'll tell you this, now that I know that Joshua sits on the front end of the chapter and the back end of the chapter, and having read the story and listened to it again with you, I think we could all surmise the takeaways that Joshua took from the story.

[27 : 47] Probably very different takeaways than you and I would gather from just reading the story. But Joshua now knows as he stands on the cusp of his conquest, three things.

Joshua now knows through the report that opposition exists for him in Rahab's world. That if he is going to retake Rahab's world, opposition will confront him.

Though, he also knows that his mission will succeed. Through Rahab's risks, he has been made aware that the battle is actually already done.

All he has to do is rise, stand, and walk. And you're going to see it next week. I love the opening line of chapter 3. Then Joshua rose early in the morning.

It's right there in the text. And he's going to set out. He is prepared to go. He knows opposition exists in the world.

[28 : 49] He knows his mission will succeed given the risks that have been revealed to him in that world. And though he is coming to judge, he now knows he is under oath to save those who are in the world.

That this self-revelation to Joshua would have been, God has anointed me to bring God's judgment and justice into the whole world. And before he ever goes, he now knows, and as I bring his judgment over all peoples, over all places, to the ends of the earth, I am under oath to save out from underneath that judgment.

Because the Lord is merciful, steadfast in love, that he doesn't want any to perish, but everyone to come to a knowledge of who he is into life.

The picture of Joshua is interesting. We see a stern, holy, righteous God wedded to his mercy. Well, let's think for a moment then, having listened to the story, what are the lessons we're to take from all our listening? We began by saying we're reading a true story, one that will have significance for your story.

[30 : 22] We began by saying it's a story that actually is about life and death and it will have implications for your life and your death. And we began by saying that we noticed that her story is set within the larger story.

Joshua, as the story goes on, will give way to one named Jesus, simply the Greek version of the Hebrew name.

In fact, the messenger will come and say, you need to call him Jesus for he will save the people from their sins. that when Jesus comes from the threshold of heaven, if he had reflected on this story, and I do not know, I wonder if he would have thought before plunging into our world, opposition awaits me there, but victory is secure for me there, and I am under an oath to save men and women from there.

We do know, at least this much, that the writer to Hebrews, when he writes, he says, consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, and then he launches into the word of Christ from the word of God, sacrifices and offerings you don't want, but a body you have prepared for me.

Then I said, behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book, that Jesus did say, I'm going to fulfill God's oath to save.

[32 : 17] I don't know how to put it. God wants to take up residence in your home. I don't know how to say it. Jesus is more than willing to dwell among those of ill repute.

He's not going to mind walking in and sitting down with you. And he knows all about you. He's able to help you turn your back on the world in which you live, separate yourself from all that you've known to be true, and become a member of his family.

And as the Bible story will go on, the spies line in verse 14, our life for yours, even unto death, will find a resting place in Jesus' work, my life for yours, yes, even by means of my death.

The climactic word, the voice of Jesus himself, not his emissary, not his messenger, himself, my life for yours, my death for yours, my life yours.

And so the question for you and me here today is do you want it? Do you want life? He's coming for you. Think about it then, how this text informs all that we need to do.

[33 : 51] we need to take Rahab-like risks if we want any hope of eternal reward. We live in a world where we have all offended God.

We dwell among the people who oppose God. We have to do something. We have to say something. God may be asking you to do something today.

You know, there was a day when our children were little. I don't even think all of them were born yet. I got a call from a pastor in Chicago and he said, I'm speaking with a woman.

Her life is in danger. Her husband is armed. He has capacity and he's looking for her now to kill her and I need to get her into a safe place.

Can she come stay with you? I'm just getting ready to go to lunch. Let me call you after lunch. Now, I know I probably should have said yes, but I walked home for lunch.

[34 : 53] We sat there. We had two little kids. I think it might have been three in one, infant, nursing, whatever, tiny kids. We talked about it. We actually said to one another, I know someone ought to be willing to take that risk, but us?

Someone we don't even know in our house with some guy chasing her down with a gun? Us? I said, well, let's pray about it for an hour or so. I went back to the office, and when I got to the office, a man was waiting to see me.

And I looked at him and said, what are you doing here? You're supposed to be here tomorrow at this time. He said, really? I'm a day early? I said, yeah, we got an appointment tomorrow. He goes, oh, well, here I am.

I said, I got a lot going on. He goes, well, then I've only got a couple words for you. the Lord asked me to come today. Dave, risk and rest. And he turned around and walked out the door.

I picked up the phone and I said, Lise, we need to get a bed made. Made a call. Stranger comes, knocks on the door, enters in behind the walls.

[36 : 09] Shelter is given. And I still, to this moment, remember laying awake in the middle of the night wondering, somewhat fearfully, who is this that sleeps so close to my children?

And who is it that might yet knock on my door before the morning light to do her harm? Risk is required. Rahab opened up her home. Open your home up. Abraham left his home and all that he had known, such was the risk God asked him to make. And if he asks you to rise and to go away from your family into a place that you know no one, that may be the risk he wants.

[37 : 22] So as Rahab opens up her home as a statement of risk-taking, others are leaving their home. Moses himself gave up the pleasures and treasures and the wealth of his home in order that he might stand with those who had no wealth and no treasure.

Jesus. Come on. Jesus left his home, was mistreated to the point of death in this home, to create a home where you would rest secure.

Do something. I don't know what risk he's asking you to take. Do something. And say something. Demonstrate your allegiance to your Lord through your speech.

And in saying something, pray something. Pray something beyond the needs of your own life, but to your father, to your mother, to your brother, to your sister, and not only to them, but all the little rugrats who come as a count of them.

And then also unto me, oh God. Christ Church Chicago, what risks are we taking? We took a big one to try to do this thing, I know, but I'm not trying to get into all that.

[39 : 00] But it was a risk, and worth it. What risk does God want from us next? What does he want from us?

We ought to be asking him, and it ought to be in the language of people, fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers, and children who are all under the oppressive rule of the world and without hope save his sovereign mercy.

Do something. Say something. Believe me, the reward will be worth all that we can do in the land of the living.

Rahab's life has meaning because Joshua matters.

You and I have meaning because Jesus stands like sentinel bookends on either side of your life, and he is coming, and he wants to know something, and he is wanting to reveal to you that one day he's coming for you.

[40 : 23] He's coming for you. He is coming for us, either by way of reward or just recompense. So take the risk. Leave this world.

Our reward is in another place anyway. Our Heavenly Father, this beautiful woman of the scriptures, so full of life, so magnificent in insight, so genuine in her pleadings, so rewarded by your mercies.

We treasure her today, for she stands on the other side, of the genealogy of Christ. And through her own faith, which put her in the line that brought your son, may we on the backside get in line and live in accordance with his rule.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.