

Joshua 2 “Grace in an Unexpected Place”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Amen. We thank you all so much. And for the reminder of God's faithfulness to every generation. We want to live in that a little bit by bringing the kids up here.

Kids, if you all would come on down and sit on these steps over here with me. We're going to talk for just a minute as we start to look at God's Word together. That was quick. All right. Yeah, just somewhere over here on the steps. That's great.

You can start there. Everybody just get a seat where you can see me. All right. Awesome.

Today, when we start our sermon, we're going to be reading a story from the book of Joshua. Have you ever heard of Joshua? I know there's names, Joshua.

[1 : 04] Some of you have named Joshua. That's awesome. Yeah. Joshua leads God's people into the promised land, doesn't he?

Remember last week, God powerfully brought them out of Egypt through the Red Sea. He delivered them and now we're in the promised land. God keeps all of his promises, doesn't he?

Did you all hear that song they were just singing? You keep your promises, your covenant. That means God's faithful in relationship with us, to be with us.

So what happens is when they get in this land, God gives every one of his people, no, not Carter. Carter, you sit on the stool. Yep. You don't, yep. God gives every one of his people an inheritance. Do you all know what inheritance is? That's a big word, isn't it?

[2 : 00] Here you go. Can you pass those to the people behind you, Emerson? Awesome.

Anybody know what inheritance is? This is not an inheritance. This is pretend money, okay?

This is just pretend money for each of you to be a picture of inheritance this morning, all right? I want to make sure everybody gets one. And did you get one?

There you go. Yeah. Thank you. Inheritance in the promised land meant a piece of land, okay?

Where you could have a place to live, have a place to be safe, have a place to grow the food that you needed to eat.

That was part of God's inheritance for his people. He gave all of them, well, almost all of them. Did you get anything, Carter? No.

Oh, that's really sad. Are you sad? Yes. Thank you for pretending. How are you going to buy food to eat with no money?

[3 : 01] I don't know. I don't either. And see, this is what happened to God's people in the promised land. God gave an inheritance to every tribe except one tribe, the tribe of Levi, okay?

So how were they going to make it? What were they going to do? How were they going to eat? And yet this is one of the neatest things in the whole book of Joshua. You know what God says?

God says to the tribe of Levi, you didn't get an inheritance in the land because I, your God, will be your inheritance. You get me, God says.

You're going to be especially close to me. We're going to have this special relationship. And that's going to be all that he needs because guess what? He's the banker, isn't he? Yeah?

Yeah? He's the one with all the money that you need, right? So when he gets God, is he going to be able to eat? Is he going to have a place to live?

[4 : 04] Is he going to have someone he can trust to take care of him no matter what? Yeah, because he is with God. It reminds God's people.

This whole arrangement is set up to remind them that is the land the most important thing they need? Is that money really what you need? Is it going to get you the most important thing?

No. God's reminding them that he himself is the most important thing that they need. And that if they have him, they will have everything that they need because he will take care of them. It's having God himself, knowing him, trusting him, loving him. That is the thing you most need, okay? So here's what I'm going to ask you to do this morning. In just a minute, when you get up, I want you all to walk by this pew.

And I want you to throw your fake money back on the pew, okay? And I want you to go and pick up a Bible when you go where you're going next. And I want you to remember that the most important thing for you to have is not money, but it's God himself.

[5 : 11] That he speaks to you. That he gives you his word. That he promises to be with you. And that he always keeps his promises. Can you all remember that? You're going to put your money down and then go find a Bible.

Some of you are in kids' worship and you're going back there with Miss Afton. You see Miss Afton back there? If you go to kids' worship, you can go back there with her. The rest of you can go back to your seats now and go get a Bible and read it with us in just a minute, okay?

Money on the pew and go get your Bible. Thanks, y'all. Thank you, Carter. That was not intentionally timed with the finance update.

But I hope you didn't put fake money in the plate the way I did. The last time we preached from Joshua was when we began a chapter-by-chapter study through the book of Joshua, April of 2020. April of 2020. COVID had just upended our world. And we turned to Joshua to learn about living in fear and uncertainty.

[6 : 55] My favorite verse comes near the end of the book. Chapter 21, verse 45. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed.

All came to pass. That's kind of the conclusion. COVID is a lesser threat these days, but we still live in a world of fear and uncertainty.

Yes? Plenty of it. And it's still true that God has shown himself faithful to all of his promises to us. But if you're like me, you acknowledge that it can still be difficult to trust God even when he has come through for you before. As we turn to Joshua this morning, God's people are back 40 years later in a place where they have been before.

They've stood there when God brought them out of Egypt, out of slavery there, all the way to the banks of the Jordan River.

[8 : 09] But when they sent spies into the promised land and they got scary reports back from those spies, fear, uncertainty, and more.

They lost heart. They lost faith. And now God has brought another generation back after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness to those same stormy banks of the Jordan.

And as they send spies across the Jordan again, look how gracious God is to remind his people that he can be trusted to come through for them again.

Listen to the story of Rahab and the spies and God's grace in an unexpected place. This is Joshua chapter 2 from God's holy 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.

[9 : 25] 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 did 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 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. 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 Sion and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

[10 : 38] 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. 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 where 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 the 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 of 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.

[11 : 56] 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. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua, 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.

God's holy word. Let's pray. Oh, Father, would you give us eyes to see, minds to understand, hearts to believe your truth.

[13 : 01] To see your salvation. To trust Jesus more today. We ask in his name. Amen. Amen. When you are reading the Bible devotionally for yourself or when you're studying a portion of it more deeply, maybe you want to learn more.

It's important to consider what it tells us about God. Since it is, after all, his word, right? And he's the one that we were made to know.

That can be especially helpful in an Old Testament passage that seems so long ago, like the one we just read or the ones maybe you've been reading lately.

If you're doing the chronological Bible reading plan and thinking, what does this have to do with me? Well, we'll start, what does the passage teach us about God? Right? He's the same one in the story we're living.

And then, what does it teach us about living in relationship with him? What do we learn about that? I thought we would use those two questions and just make two brief passes through this story to answer those questions together.

[14 : 10] And maybe that would encourage you to use those questions on your own as you contemplate other Bible stories. So, we'll start with the first one. And what does it tell us about God?

Well, when I consider the story of Rahab and the spies, the overarching aspect of God's character that is on brilliant display here is his faithfulness.

You may have heard that word. It's possible it's been sung this morning once or twice. It means that he can be trusted to keep his promises. Not one word of all of them will fail.

Right? That's the comfort that he gives to his fearful, uncertain people right in the place of their failure. He says, I'm still faithful.

We see it most explicitly in the land promise. There in the very first verse of chapter 2, the spies are sent to view the land.

[15 : 14] And then in the last verse where the Lord has given the land into their hands. That's pretty clear. It's also highlighted by Rahab right in the middle when she says, I know that the Lord has given you the land.

That the fear of you has fallen upon us. That all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. Verse 11, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. She's highlighting the power of Yahweh, right? Right? See, part of the reason that God can be faithful to all of the different kinds of promises that he's made is that he's not some tribal deity, but rather the universal sovereign over all the land and all lands.

See, most of the so-called gods of the Canaanites, they had one little piece of land, one little area, one little aspect of life that they were supposedly in charge of.

Yahweh is very different. Yahweh is God of the skies and the lands and everywhere in between. The one true God.

[16 : 31] He's got the power to be faithful to whatever promise he makes. He can bring people from a long distance away with no power and might of their own.

No military expertise. And he can put them in this land if he so chooses. And he can bring you from this broken world and whatever low place you experience in it into the promised land of your inheritance and rest.

He can do that for you too. But this story is about much more than merely getting people into the land. In fact, if you think back to the story, I'm not sure the spies find out anything strategically helpful about the land, like a secret way in or a water source in Jericho.

It's just not what happens. And why would they need to? Many of you will have known the story of Jericho. God's about to tell them that they're going to conquer Jericho not by some creative strategy, but by marching around the city seven times and blowing trumpets.

That's how the walls of Jericho are going to fall down, right? Didn't need spies for that. So what's happening? Why is Rahab's story even here?

[17 : 50] I think, at least in part, it's giving us a glorious glimpse of God's faithfulness to his promise to bless. Bless the people of Abraham, right?

The promise, that special relationship they have with Yahweh. That's the blessing, right? That's at the heart of it. And then, not merely to bless them, but through them to bless all nations, right? See, the conquering of Jericho, if you read the story, primarily highlights God's judgment against people whose sin he abhorred. He had waited generations since he told Abraham the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

You're not going in there yet, Abraham, but now they are. Now God will judge the wickedness of child sacrifice throughout that culture.

Of a religion that featured cult prostitution and many other terrible things. Ways of life in Jericho. But when we think that we read the story and the only thing that's going on is spying, God is up to something else entirely.

[19 : 08] He's saving. He's showing us his grace. Not merely his power, but his grace that allows him to keep his promises, to keep all of them.

Because he's not merely powerful, but extraordinarily gracious. There's a wideness in God's mercy, the song says. A wideness in God's mercy that once again preserves, even while punishing. His people are blessed here as well as this Gentile woman and her family. They are blessed with this blessed relationship with Yahweh.

God's people and the nations. So of all the people in Jericho, why the prostitute God? Because sometimes, as Jesus tells us, they go into the kingdom ahead of the preachers.

Desperate to trust themselves to a God of grace. Because we need to marvel at a God who rescues Canaanite prostitutes and puts words of faith into their mouths that teach the people of God to trust him.

[20 : 23] That teach us who he is. He speaks through people like Rahab. And because we need to share God's heart that calls sin, sin.

He judges very seriously. But the heart that never stops expressing grace and rescuing lost sinners from every nation.

That has always been God's heart and it has not changed. But it doesn't stop there, does it? It's even better than that in this story. The woman who seems to have lived alone.

Who seems to have failed morally. Right in the area of family. If you had to pick one, right? What does God do? God brings her into his family.

To belong among his people. Here's what we read when the Israelites conquer Jericho. Everyone else dies but Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belong to her.

[21 : 21] Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day. Because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. Do you hear the extent of God's grace there?

And she has lived in Israel to this day. Scandalous, right? Do you feel that? If she was your neighbor? The Gentile prostitute gets not just a reprieve from death.

And now, make your own way in the world? No. No. When God rescues someone, he brings them into his family. Fully a part of his covenant community.

Welcomed into a grace group. Because the sovereignly powerful, amazingly gracious God is also personally loving. Rahab has a family.

A place to belong. Because of the faithfulness of God. Let me just say, I hope Rahabs always find a place to belong at Southwood. Do you see God's faithfulness as he does this?

[22 : 29] To yet another promise. Remember what he told Abraham? He said, Abraham, you're going to be a great people. Because I'm going to give you a family.

Because God promised Adam even further back that there would be the seed of the woman who would come to crush the head of the serpent.

That seed promise, as you're seeing as we go through these stories, it's tracked through the whole Old Testament. Over and over. Where's the seed? As God's people grow and they struggle, where's the seed?

Where's the hope coming from? So now, grafted into the great people of God comes a woman in need of restoration to a family who, against all odds, marries.

And we later learn, is in the line of the Messiah. The seed who comes to crush the head of the serpent and to fulfill all of God's promises.

[23 : 34] Listen, if God can make Rahab an ancestor of Jesus, then he can make you and me children of God. Brothers and sisters of Jesus and of one another.

And he can do the same for our friends who don't look like us or act like us. Who don't talk like us or worship like us.

Even for our enemies and persecutors, no one is beyond his grace. So no one is beneath us, right? The story of God, the gospel of Jesus, must be the end of snobbery.

It has to be. The worst and the furthest away are brought right into the center. Right where they've failed. Right where they're fearful. God faithfully rescues.

That's the story we live in. That's how it works, friends. There are many people out there with the power to keep promises.

[24 : 39] But not the generous heart to follow through. There are many other people out there with tender hearts. But limited resources to have impact on keeping their promises beyond their very limited sphere of influence.

And there is one living God with the power over all heaven and earth. With the grace to reach to the least deserving.

And the love to bring all of us undeserving people who trust him eternally home to the promised land with him forever. Now listen, there are legitimate reasons for fear and uncertainty in our world. There's more failure in all of our lives than we wish. But none of that will stop him from being faithful in general or in your life specifically.

There is a God that you can trust no matter what is going on around you or what has gone on inside of you. And if you don't believe that, ask Rahab the prostitute, the ancestor of Jesus.

[25 : 52] He's that god. Alright, that's who he is. It's important though when we open God's word not merely to seek for intellectual knowledge about him, who he is.

But to ask next, what can we learn about living in relationship with him? How does this impact how I have a day in and day out relationship with this God?

Often, if you'll use these two questions, you'll find that they helpfully connect. Like here. God is faithful. We live in relationship with him by faith.

He can be trusted. We must trust him. This narrative is structured to highlight the faith that Rahab has in Yahweh.

She expresses it to the spies in verses 9 through 13. Let's look at that faith together. The faith God is calling us to have finds safety in the sovereign and gracious God.

[27 : 01] In other words, God is so strong and so good that nothing else is needed. Notice Rahab's faith.

Yahweh has given you this land. He's brought you through the Red Sea, performed all these miracles, and I've realized he is my only hope.

So now even the Gentile prostitute can cast herself on him and be saved. It's like Jesus telling us it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I've come to call not the righteous who've done enough to be granted safe passage.

No, no. But the sinners who've done nothing to earn my favor, but get it poured on them lavishly. See, anyone can find safety with this God.

Even those facing his judgment. Even an immoral Gentile. So you are not beyond his reach. But everyone must find safety in him.

[28 : 02] His judgment against our sin is real. And none of us is guaranteed tomorrow, are we? None of us. None of us. The only place of eternal safety is trusting in Jesus.

I urge you, if you haven't done that already, flee to him today. Run to Jesus for refuge. If you don't know how to do that, it's not meant to be complicated.

All you do is to say, Jesus, I need you. I can't save myself. I trust you to rescue me and to keep me safe forever.

Jesus promises that you'll find shelter under his wings. And not one word of all his promises has failed. Flee to him right now.

Right now. Run to Jesus. Jesus. And if you already have. If you trust him. I want you to learn something else about faith from Rahab.

[29 : 05] Faith that has found safety in our God risks safety. To trust God. The king of Jericho.

Okay. Get that in your mind. The king of Jericho. Powerful guy. Sends men to Rahab to tell her what to do. To turn over the men who have come to her.

What's the easy way forward for Rahab? Turn him in. At a minimum, you're safe if you turn him in. Perhaps even you become a local hero.

You know, you caught the spies. Instead, Rahab risks it all. Certain torture and death if she's caught in a lie.

But she risks it all for the sake of this God who has clearly transformed her heart. I met a woman named Seema in India when she was 35.

[30 : 07] Just a couple years ago. All of her life to that point she had been Hindu until Jesus had miraculously delivered her into relationship with him.

The problem was that her husband and both of their families remained Hindu. And he had told her that if she did not disown this God that she worshipped, that he would throw her out of the house. When she tried to read her Bible, he would abuse her. Threaten to kick her out. And when she eventually decided to go forward with being baptized, he ran her off.

With the support of their families and the government, he kept her away entirely from her middle school aged kids. Nowhere to live.

No access to her kids. Until her church took her in and housed her at the Bible college that we support over there where I was teaching.

[31 : 11] And she'd been living there for almost a couple of years. Praying for her husband. Missing her kids terribly.

Risking safety beyond what most of us understand. To trust God. Maybe that's not what faith in Jesus costs you.

That may not be your story. Although even in our country these days, faith in Christ can cost you even your life. Would you risk the safety of your reputation?

Of your comfort? Of your relationships? To trust the God who keeps his promises to you even when you can't see how? Rahab's faith is amazing.

In her culture there wasn't even a concept of a God like this. Gods ruled over little parts of life. Little areas of land. One nation or another. But Rahab says, no, no.

[32 : 15] Yahweh rules over heaven above and all of the earth. It's as though there is no other God to trust. No other God to receive blessing from.

No other God at all. But this one. There's one and he rescues people. And Rahab knows that she needs to be rescued. In our culture, gods do lots of things.

They make you look good. They make you seem important. They make you feel comfortable. Yahweh doesn't promise you that.

But faith in him risks that safety to trust the one who rules over all of creation and all of eternity. He is the banker. Right? He is the one who can always be himself and give to you all that you need. Don't look for it anywhere else.

[33 : 19] Finally, beautifully, faith in this faithful God invites others into safety with God.

This involves further risk, by the way, doesn't it? What would Rahab have to tell her family members to get them into her house? Would they laugh at her story of Yahweh's protection?

Would one of them turn her in? Could have. Instead, isn't it beautiful? The home of immorality becomes a haven of refuge.

A safe house against the judgment of God. Marked by the scarlet cord in the window. So Rahab immediately, as soon as she talks to the spies, she has an invite list ready right at the top of her mind, doesn't she?

Who's coming in? And now all of a sudden, as a father and mother and brother and sister and in-laws, all of these people running to Rahab's house, they were usually heaping judgment on themselves and their idolatrous behavior.

[34 : 26] But now they're running to Rahab's house to be embraced by grace. Right? To find safety in the one place that's safe in all of Jericho. Are you inviting others into the safe house that you've found in Jesus?

I want to be honest with you. For a lot of wrong and right reasons, a church building like this one doesn't feel safe to many outsiders. It's not true for all, but it's true for some.

What would it look like for you then to welcome a neighbor into your life, into your home, into your grace group even, so that they taste the faithfulness of God and the covenant community into which he longs to include them?

The front of our bulletin says, We open wide our doors, our hearts, our lives as our God has done for us.

Will you be a part of that? Will you pray about whom God would have you invite into safety? Safety in him? How they could experience safety through you?

[35 : 37] Once again, in this story, the picture of God's rescue and restoration in the midst of just judgment involves coming into the safe house, into the ark, into the home marked by the blood of the Lamb, into salvation in Jesus Christ by faith in him.

Listen, no one you love should be left outside. And no one, not your family, not your neighbor, not your enemy, should be left outside your love.

No one. Your life, then, when you come to worship, when you love in covenant community, when you confess your sin and repent publicly, when you forgive the sin of others, your life is marked by those things as a safe house for those who would flee to the faithful God for refuge, the one who is faithful to all his promises.

Not one word of all of his promises has failed or will fail. All will come to pass. So won't you live by faith in him, no matter the cost, for the salvation of your soul and the safety of everyone you love?

This table sets before us this morning a reminder that our safety is in God. We find it not in ourselves, not in our performance, but in him, in the blood of the lamb covering our sins.

[37 : 24] It's what Jesus was explaining when he, on the night he was betrayed, celebrated this Passover with his disciples and filled it with new meaning. He took the bread and he broke it and gave it to his disciples.

Just as I'm ministering in his name, give this bread to you. He said, take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way also, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it, all of you. You need that forgiveness. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. If you're here today and you're not in the safe house of Jesus, perhaps you know that you've never trusted him.

Or maybe you know that you have, but right now you're standing outside refusing to repent of a particular sin and to come in to Jesus to find forgiveness and restoration and safety.

then don't come to this table, but do see it as a warning and an invitation. Warning, don't be left outside the safe house to face your sins on your own, to deal with them yourself.

[38 : 56] You will be dealing with them for eternity and you won't be able to pay for them. Invitation, come into the safe house today.

There's one whose blood does cover and does pay. By faith alone, in Christ alone, find all the forgiveness and relationship and life that you'll ever long for and that you'll enjoy for all eternity. If you have come inside by faith in the Lamb who was slain for you, if you're in His family, here or at another church, then come this morning.

Eat with us and more importantly with Him to strengthen your faith no matter what may come. Let's pray and then we'll celebrate together. Jesus, we give you great thanks for your sacrifice that made a way to God, that made it safe for sinners to be in the presence of a holy God because we're covered, united to you.

Would you use bread and wine to remind us of that this morning? very common things that are pointing us to something that is way beyond normal.

[40 : 20] Your grace and love, the gift of Yourself for us. Strengthen our faith as we eat that we would know You're with us, know You can be trusted, and we trust You afresh.

In Jesus' name, Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Amen.