

Be Strong

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[0 : 0 0] I love the newer James Bond movies especially Casino Royale, Quantum of Solace and I can't wait for Spectre with Daniel Craig the sensitive, the opening scene in one of those movies Casino Royale maybe crashing from one building and one tower crane to another and the sensitive manly appeal to beautiful women the six pack, the chiselled features of the man who kills out of duty but for the greater good and in fact I don't think it's too immodest of me to say that he reminds me somewhat of myself especially the six pack and the iron muscled body let me tell you, you laugh, my mum loves me she gave birth to me and my wife finds me irresistible and she's not here today to contradict me so there you go, there you go

James Bond movies are usually a great watch for action and outcomes big picture adventure western civilisation crushes enemies who are hell bent on exploring or exploiting or destroying it but if you want to learn about ethics and morality go elsewhere human relationships are selfishly plundered the hero beds one woman after another he takes the life of any enemy who gets in the way that's James Bond when you come to Joshua 2 it reads like a James Bond thriller it's got it all espionage, state secrets, political intrigue an immoral woman and it all happened 3400 years ago Israel stands on the verge of entering the land of giants they're standing where they stood 40 years before and God's promise remains Joshua 1, God assures and reassures Joshua that he is with us

Judson did this much better than me have I not commanded you be strong and courageous do not be terrified do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go so Joshua is Israel's God appointed leader he is an experienced military commander he will lead the conquest into the land and he is as the commander he is called to submit himself to the word of God verse 8 chapter 1 do not let this book of the Lord depart from your mouth meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it and then you will be prosperous and successful so Joshua sends out a reconnaissance mission in Joshua chapter 2 he says verse 1 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 now get the story two spies sent into the land to suss it out they're instructed to take particular attention to Jericho the mission's secret it's dangerous they set out and without any explanation just happened to find themselves staying in the house of a woman of renown

Rahab sells herself for money and it begs a lot of questions doesn't it whose bright idea was it to go to her place Joshua sent them to Jericho and they found their way to the local brothel you can just imagine them telling this story when they get back home in Israel well they're not there yet but explaining themselves to their wives when they get back to camp let alone Joshua probably say they'd seen James Bond and that's how they thought spies did it you're all very quiet we saw this in our small group the other night we read this passage the other night and people struggled with the morality of what is going on here and they wanted to justify the spies and justify where they were and then Rahab tells a lie and they wanted to explain away Rahab's lie we did as a group but for all the questions that we might ask the Bible doesn't answer them it just tells us what happens the men have been noticed so verse 2 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 the missions discovered the king knows where they are the secret police know whose house they went to he knows their operation and he wants them caught and the king's officers turn up at Rahab's place and say turn them in hand them over and she says sorry boys they've gone

I didn't know where they came from they ducked out the city gate just before dusk I don't know where they went if you go quickly you might catch them she is a spectacularly good liar she tells it smoothly and she gets a really great result she saves them in verse 6 it says she'd taken them up onto the roof she'd hidden them under the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof and 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 got out the gate was shut so how good's that the prostitute lies she saves them she could have been a hero in her own city collected the reward but she protected these two invaders and it begs a really big question why on earth would she do such a thing and you find that out in verses 8 to 13 she went up on the roof and she said to them

[6 : 44] I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt and what you did to Sion and Og the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan whom you completely destroyed when we heard of it our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below 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 that you will save us from death

Rahab the foreigner the prostitute has a faith in God which if the people of God had had 40 years before they would have been in the land 40 years before Rahab knows a number of things about the Lord she knows that Israel is not just helping themselves to this land the Lord is giving it to them she knows how the Lord has saved and protected his people in the past she's heard about them coming out of Egypt how the Lord opened the Red Sea and drowned the Egyptian army and she knows that Sion and Og the Amorite kings were destroyed by Israel she knows that the Lord God is with Israel and she and the whole of the people of Jericho are terrified they're trembling in their boots they're sick with fear but Rahab has gone a step further she just doesn't fear the circumstances that she's in she fears the Lord for herself and she has come to this extraordinary conclusion in verse 12 the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below he's not just one of the gods he is awesome in power and he is God over everything in heaven and on earth there is nowhere that he is not God now she won't know every detail of the Jewish belief system she won't understand sacrifices and rules but she has come to believe in the Lord

Rahab has come to a great truth and knowledge of that truth now leads her into great danger she's come to a moment of decision what is she going to do she now knows God and knowing God forces action upon her she's seen she has believed and she confesses her faith by her action by where she now puts her feet you think about it she ended into great danger when she helped those spies it wasn't just an act of virtue she wasn't it was hardly a virtuous woman but her hand was forced because she could see a greater and an inevitable danger she could see the awesome power of God and his certain coming judgment on Jericho she was afraid for her life and for her family's life she recognised who the real

God is and she effectively in that moment she had a choice she could have shut her eyes to what was coming she could rationalise the danger away she could go back to the local Jericho gods and blindly hope that they could withstand the Israelites she could head up to the Chatswood chase of Jericho and pretend that there was another reality outside or that there wasn't another reality outside but she didn't she placed her faith and confidence in the God of the Israelites she became convinced about his purposes she saved the spies she weighed the cost and she took the risk of being brutally killed by her own community and you have a picture here of faith which is costly it's like a razor wire fence a fence that you cannot sit on it forces a decision

Jesus says things like whoever is not for me is against me and he also said no one can serve two masters he will love the one and hate the other he also says if any person would come after me they must deny themselves take up their cross and follow me faith for Jesus was death before glory faith in Christ may mean great suffering for us before resurrection God's coming judgment is the great shadow which is hanging over Jericho and so there is a much bigger deal in this passage than Rahab's occupation she was a working girl from God's point of view bigger issues are at stake if

[12 : 48] Jericho was a modern city it would have had doctors and administrative assistants and storemen and lawyers and tradesmen and IT consultants and house mums and priests and teachers but God's judgment was coming on that entire city on everyone and yet here we are Rahab the prostitute was the one who feared God more than anybody else very low on the social Richter scale but this is an extraordinary expression of faith faith is like that real faith draws us out of the closet Jesus becomes our new centre who he is what he's done for us should be making an impact on who we are there's a cost back back in our families they should be noticing a difference in our workplace people should see a difference in our behaviour and in our attitude as we come to know and grow in

Christ and with that comes an opportunity to tell and to declare we have a message of salvation in the face of the coming judgment of God and people will sometimes be drawn to and like what we stand for and other times they will hate us for what God has done so Rahab the prostitute saw the danger that she was in she cried out for help even while she was still working and that says something to us about God's message of salvation that we have in Christ it needs to be heard and the cost counted before it can be accepted it needs to be accepted before it can bring change and transformation and the Christian community church is a place for sinners who are being transformed by the grace of Christ and we get it back to front in our thinking when we think we've got to scrub up right before we can come into

God's presence and meet here with his people I spoke to some believers recently and they wanted to impose all sorts of relational rules in their church before they talked to people about baptism and there's some good reasons for that but it's what they did and I said to them I would rather have a conversation about Jesus with someone about the gospel before I have a personal conversation with anybody about their morality you don't have to be good enough before you find out about Christ you have to find Christ so that he can begin to bring change and transformation to you so this should be a place with all sorts of people sitting in the pews not the pews anymore is it it's the chairs from all sorts of backgrounds struggling with all sorts of sin people who are not across the line yet in terms of Christ but who sit here and know that it's okay to sit here amongst us that you don't have to be a particular type of person before you can sit in church you know it's rubbish to think that we can make ourselves good enough for God the scriptures say while we were still sinners

Christ died for us God comes near to us in our broken lives he deals with us God is with us in the person of Jesus Jesus was always being criticised for hanging out around tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners a number of notorious women became disciples of Jesus the woman at Simon's house washing his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair and Simon the host of the function exclaiming in bewilderment to Jesus don't you know who she is God has come near and he is extraordinarily compassionate and he is able to deal with our baggage if we come Rahab is honoured in the scriptures she sees salvation she grabs it with both hands she's there in the roll call of flawed but faithful saints in

Hebrews 11 she pops up in Matthew chapter 1 in the genealogy of Jesus she is one of the great grandmothers of King David Rahab's life was in disarray like most of ours to some extent or another but she recognised the great truth about God and it caused her to cry out for mercy and so she said to the spies verse 12 now then please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I've shown kindness to you give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother my brothers and sisters all who belong to them that you will save us from death she pleads for salvation and they make a promise in response to her plea our lives for your life don't do us in and we'll treat you with kindness and mercy she lets them go safely out the window they told her message that they told her the message that would save her tie the scarlet rope cloth to your window and when destruction comes to

[19 : 07] Jericho we will save whoever is in your house no one will be safe except those who are in this room so they promised rescue she chose to take them at their word she acted in faith she trusted what they said to her and when we get to chapter 6 we'd see that she's saved that's a few weeks away she couldn't name the terms of her salvation she had to accept and trust the terms that were offered one way only one set of terms that happens across the bible no one can dictate the terms on which they're safe with god you either accept the terms or you reject the terms for us john 3 16 for god so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life for god did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him so god's terms of salvation and forgiveness are in the son of god who was lifted up on a dead piece of timber and died and god says that he loves us by providing another to deal with the danger so god says accept what jesus has done or die you cannot design your own religion you're a fool if you think that you can tell god how to be god but he is extraordinarily merciful in the most surprising ways he saves a prostitute from an important city where everybody else would perish and today he makes a wonderful promise to us that those who believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life rahab trusted the promise she was saved believers trust in the promise of christ confident that we will be safe on the day of god's judgment belief in jesus and the cross of christ is like the scarlet rag hung from the window in the wall seeking the protection of god on the day of his judgment rahab was brought to great faith by the supernatural mercy and grace of the lord she knew him and he saved her and if we're believers we are powerfully protected by the same extraordinary grace we go from here with a scarlet thread the message of the cross a message which if believed and received and acted upon will save the life of even your worst enemy god's grace is offered to all even the most unlikely which includes you and it also includes me amen