

God has a plan

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[0:00] I'm going to read Joshua chapter 2 verse 160. She said, And as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, I know that the Lord has given this land to you, and that 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, and when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sheon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

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.

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.

[2:08] Then you will spare the lives of my mother and my father, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death. Our lives for your lives, the men are sure to her.

If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land. So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall.

Now that she had said to them, go to the hills so that the pursuers will not find you, hide yourselves there for three days until they return and then go your way.

Well, thanks, Shaheen. You'll remember that last week we left Joshua on the verge of going into the promised land. Joshua had received a confirmation from God that this land was for the Israelites and was for him as it had been promised to Moses.

And furthermore, he'd been promised that the God of angel armies would be with him as he went in and took the land. So one would imagine that chapter two would say, and they got up, went across the Jordan and into the land, but it doesn't.

[3:28] It's like the lens, which was on wide angle to God's purposes, now focuses in on one particular person called Rahab, a prostitute in Canaan, in Jericho.

How strange. What's going on? Why the delay? Well, I'd like us to take us into the text to discover that.

And if you turn through to Joshua chapter two, verses one to eight, we see some very surprising surveillance going on. Joshua chooses to send two spies into the land.

Now, they don't seem tremendously good spies to me. They find themselves in Jericho, a place which Joshua had said to go, but they find themselves in Rahab's house.

Furthermore, they find themselves already identified as spies when they almost arrive. So they certainly are not under the radar, one would say.

[4:32] So we've got these spies in Rahab's house and the king's looking for them. Thankfully, Rahab chooses, the one friend they perhaps have made since they've been in Jericho, Rahab chooses to help them.

She hides them. She hides the spies to save the spies. She lies, if you like, to save these spies. And in fact, she gets quite good at this lying and she sends the king's men on a bit of a goose chase.

So we see surprising surveillance. And then it's even more surprising when we hear a prophetic proclamation that comes in verses nine to 11.

One wouldn't necessarily expect to hear a prophecy in a foreign land of pagan people when you're trying to take them over. But that's exactly what happens.

Have a look at verse nine. It says this from the lips of Rahab. She says this. I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear has fallen on us so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

[5:56] Can you see what's happened here? Rahab not only affirms what's already been said to God's people, the other side of the Jordan, that God has given them this land, but also that there's a fear amongst the Canaanites, amongst all in Jericho.

Now, this is the kind of intelligence that Commander Joshua was looking for. And it comes from the mouth of Rahab.

Friends, we may look at what's happening here and think, well, how did God speak to Rahab? How did he communicate to her? How come she's got such truth on her lips?

And maybe we need to realise that even when we have nothing to do with it, God can be at work in places we have no knowledge of, in ways that we don't understand.

Perhaps you're feeling frustrated not to be able to go and share the good news with lots of people, and you wonder, how is God at work at this time? Well, I wonder, I wonder what's happening online with our services.

[7:06] I wonder what prayers are being said in the homes of this land at this time. I wonder how the Holy Spirit is at work in this nation, in this world, during this pandemic.

May God glorify his name, even when we can't see it. So Rahab has heard about the power of God at work through his people.

And she furthermore, in verse 11, said something else, which is just amazing, such a truth that God has revealed to her, I guess by his spirit.

She says this, The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Prophetic proclamation, remarkable.

So we start to understand that God does have a plan. He is working it out. And we kind of just realize, goodness, even when we don't understand, he is at work in places we perhaps have never been, in people we might never know.

[8:18] But judgment is about to fall on the land of Jericho, on the city of Jericho, on the land of Canaan. And what is going to happen to Rahab?

What will happen to her? What will happen to her family? We come to verses 12 to 16, and we see fruitful faith. Rahab has confessed the Lord.

She's confessed truth about him. And now in these verses, she appeals to the spies for mercy. She says, look, I've shown you mercy. Would you now show me mercy and my family?

I've given you life, my life, your life for my life. She's appealing to them for mercy from the Lord. The theologian Calvin says this of this particular passage.

Rahab is dwelling with her people in a fortified city. You'd imagine she'd feel safe. Yet she commits her life to her terrified guests, just as if they had already taken possession of the land.

[9:29] So Rahab confesses her faith. She calls out for mercy. And then she agrees with them to follow their exact instructions, which the spies of Joshua give her.

And the writer to the Hebrews places Rahab as a woman of faith in Hebrews 11, verse 31. Can you see God's plan being worked out here?

God has seen a woman, Rahab, who has, who is a woman of faith. He knows that judgment is coming upon Jericho and upon this land.

And he seeks and he saves Rahab. He's looking for those who are sinners, sinners in the world's eyes, sinners in their own eyes. And those who have faith, he's calling to himself.

And Rahab is in that great tradition, a woman of faith. Now, the whole of Jericho is about to be destroyed.

[10:37] Judgment is falling on the Canaanite people. They've been warned repeatedly. God's longing that they might turn. But in fact, they've just become more and more wicked. The spies went in and offered surprising surveillance.

Rahab has offered prophetic proclamation. But above all, God has a plan. A plan to save Rahab and her family.

As, in fact, God has done in the past in other families, like Noah and his family, before the flood came. God has a plan. And his plan is all about saving people.

Saving them from their sins. Saving them from destruction. Saving them from the judgment that is to come. And gloriously, Rahab is in that line.

But even better, Rahab is in that lovely family tree of Jesus, which we see in Matthew chapter 1. So Rahab is like the great, great, great, great, great grandmother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11:48] She herself is saved. She is saved, eventually, when the people of Israel come into the land. But also, she is the one who bore the descendants that led to Jesus, our Savior, our Lord, who brings salvation not just to the Israelites or to a Canaanite in Canaan, but to everyone.

The gospel is open to everyone. Can you see what seems to be a detour? What seems to be just this one lady in one particular place actually is part of God's saving purposes for the whole world. What wonderful news. You see, our God is a God of heaven, but he has his feet on the earth. And he'll leave the 99, all those Israelites, the other side of the Jordan, and he'll go and save the one, Rahab and her family.

His plan is personal. His plan is merciful. His plan may be surprising, unexpected.

But when we look at it, we realise it's perfect. And I think one day, we'll see all that God has been doing during this period of the pandemic.

[13:15] We may not understand it now, but I pray that in those days, we'll say, do you know, the plan was somehow perfect. Shall we come to him in prayer?

Let's pray, shall we? Loving Heavenly Father, God of heaven and earth, we worship you for your wise and perfect saving purposes in this world through Jesus.

We believe your promise that you're coming to judge all mankind, and we praise you that you'll go to any lengths, any detour to seek and save the lost.

We pray that you will find faith on the earth, and we humbly submit to your saving plan. We worship you, Lord of heaven and earth.

Amen.