Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Faith of Rahab
Scripture: Joshua 2,6
Code: 80-29

As we prepare our hearts for the Lord's table, will you open your Bible to Joshua chapter 2? Just a brief reminder of a great, great Old Testament account...Joshua, the leader of God's people, Israel, leading them into the promised land. In fact, the epitaph on Joshua given at the end of this great book is that he was the servant of the Lord. Marvelous...the servant of the Lord.

Well chapter 2 begins with these words, "And Joshua, the son of Nun, sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went and came into a harlot's house...or a prostitute's house..., her name was Rahab and they lodged there."

Moses had died. The children of Israel had spent 40 years in the wilderness after their exodus out of Egypt. It was now time for them to enter the new and promised land and Joshua who was the commander in chief was using every precaution which a skillful general would use to succeed in his invasion into Canaan. In proper fashion he sent two spies to reconnoiter the country, particularly the city of Jericho which was the border town on the eastern border just a little bit north of the Dead Sea and on the very banks of the Jordan River.

These spies were to assess whether or not Jericho was a formidable city and whether it could be taken and how. It says in verse 1 that he sent them secretly, that is not even to the knowledge of the Israelites, let alone the Canaanites. He didn't want his people to know either lest it would start some furor among them and some debate about whether this was the proper tactic. And so these men would have to swim the Jordan probably at night, approach the strongly fortified city of Jericho, get inside the gate and find a place to lodge to assess the situation.

They found a place, a harlot's house. We can safely assume they didn't know they were in a house of prostitution. We can also safely say God wanted them there because there was a woman there who was a ready heart to receive the truth. And so they were led to this house not only because it was apparently an available place, not only because there was a ready heart there, but because the house was located with its backside on the city wall and there was a way of escape should they be found out.

Verse 2 says, "It was told the king of Jericho," this would be Amelek(?), a very petty kind of king, a city king, very much more like a mayor except for the fact that he probably controlled the city militarily. "So it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold there came men in here tonight of the children of

Israel to search out the country." They weren't very good at spying, they hadn't done any of it in their lifetime. This was their first shot and they were seen. "And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men who are come to thee who are entered into thine house for they have come to search out all the country."

He was obviously frightened...frightened by the thought of invasion. He was very much aware that on the other side of the Jordan River was camped a massive multitude of people, the children of Israel, who were known to all of the inhabitants of the country for their wanderings and for many of the inhabitants of Jericho the history of how they escaped Egypt was somewhat common knowledge. And so here is a man who is trying to maintain his power in this city and he sees himself facing a massive multitude of people, perhaps numbering up to several million people. We don't know, at one time we know they did. At this particular point the numbers may have been smaller than that, but they were a great number.

In verse 4 we read, "And the woman took the two men and hid them and said thus, There came men unto me but I knew not from where they were." She hid them. Before the messengers of the king arrived, true to the oriental laws of hospitality, she risked her life to secure her guests. And when the messengers of the king came, she said...I don't know from where they were, verse 5. "And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate," and all the gates in an oriental city were always shut at sundown. So she lied and said at sundown, at the shutting of the gate when it was becoming dark the men went out. "And where the men went I know not, pursue after them quickly for you shall overtake them."

This is a common vice among heathen, it's known as lying. She was probably unconscious of its moral guilt to some extent because it was so much a way of life. But even more so because the laws of eastern hospitality perhaps even surpassed the laws of honesty. When someone came into your house even if it was your greatest enemy and ate salt at your table, you were bound to save their life whatever that meant. Honoring your guest was the highest moral law. By divine judgment she sinned, but by God's grace on the basis of her faith He forgave her, as we shall see.

But anyway, she lied about them. It wasn't necessary to do that. God would have saved them without a lie but she lied and thus she and they and all of us missed what providential means or miraculous God might have used to save them. Actually verse 6 says, "She had brought them up to the roof of the house and hid them with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order upon the roof." At this particular time of the year flax after harvesting was spread out on the roof for the purpose of being dried in the sun. And after it was dried for a period of time it was then pulled together and tied into bundles. Those bundles would be three to four feet high and they would be stacked on the roof and the spies were hiding behind the bundles.

In verse 7, after she told them that the men had left, told the messengers, then they pursued them and they went toward the Jordan, no doubt that's the way she pointed, to the fords, and there were several of them, two or three crossings of the Jordan, they pursued that way. And as soon as they who pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate. They left and the gate was shut. They shut the gate to make sure that if they were still anywhere in the city they wouldn't be able to get out.

Verse 8, "And before they were laid down she came up unto them on the roof and she said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land." Amazing. The promise that had been made to them somehow had come into her knowledge. Maybe it was even common knowledge that this marvelous group of people that had been brought out of Egypt and delivered, even though there had been those in that generation who died in the wilderness, another generation had been born and that these people were promised by their God the land. She believed that and she said, "I know that your terror has fallen on us and that all the inhabitants of this land faint because of you." Everybody is greatly in fear of you. "For 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 the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man because of you for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath." Here is a believing heart. I believe your God is God, she says. "Now therefore I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord since I have shown you kindness that you will also show kindness unto my father's house and give me a true token and that you will save alive my father and my mother and my brethren and my sisters and all that they have and deliver our lives from death."

She shows the panic and the fear of the Canaanites and she shows amazingly strong faith in the true God. She was sure of Jehovah's supremacy and she seeks a solemn pledge. Verse 14, "The men answered her, Our life for yours if you utter not this our business." If you don't tell us...tell anybody about us, if you keep your part of the bargain, we will spare you or our life for your life. "And it shall be when the Lord has given us the land that we will deal kindly and truly with you." This is the pledge, you keep quiet, we'll do our part.

Verse 15, "Then she let them down by a cord through the window for her house was upon the town wall and she dwelt upon the wall." The back of the house, the window was right on the wall, they went right out the window, therefore right outside the wall. "And she said to them, Get you to the mountains." Now the mountains were west and north, the Jordan was east and south. So she is saying, in effect, go the opposite direction of your pursuers, toward those limestone hills. If you've ever been to Jericho's ruins you can see them vividly in your eye, mind's eye, those limestone white hills that are there, pockmarked with caves to rise to a height of twelve to fifteen hundred feet immediately in the front of Jericho facing west. And they would find a place there.

"And the men said unto her," in verse 17, "We will be blameless of this your oath which you have made us swear. Behold when we come into the land you shall bind this line of scarlet thread in the window by which you did let us down and you shall bring your father and your mother and your brethren and all your father's household home to you." Get all your family in your house and put this red cord out the window. Now I don't want to get into a guessing game but I can imagine that that red cord was something like the song or the little story about, Tie a yellow ribbon on an oak tree," and when the guy shows up there's a ribbon on every branch. There may have been a whole lot of red cord hanging out of that one window. She wanted to be sure not to be missed.

Verse 20, "And if you utter this our business, then we will be free of your oath which you have made us to swear." In other words, if the word gets out that we're going to do this, obviously they could wait there to capture us and our part of the bargain is over. She said, "According unto your words, so be it and she sent them away and they departed and she bound the scarlet line in the window. And they went and came unto the mountain and abode there three days until the pursuers were returned and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way but did not find them." So, a pledge made to a believing woman.

Turn to chapter 6 verse 20...chapter 6 verse 20. And here we come later to the scene at the seventh day, the seventh circuit around the city of Jericho. You remember the Lord said go seven days, march around it seven times and on the seventh day when you've done that and the seventh time around, the walls will fall down and you can go in and capture the city. "So the people, verse 20, shouted with the priests, blowing the trumpets. It came to pass when the people heard the sound of the trumpet the people shouted with a great shout, the wall fell down flat, the people went into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." The walls just went right down and they went right in.

"They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass with the edge of the sword, but Joshua had said into the two men that spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house and bring out from there the woman and all that she hath as you swore unto her. And the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brethren and all that she had and they brought out all her kindred and left them outside the camp of Israel." They brought them out, didn't let them enter in to the camp of Israel, kept them outside. That's a temporary exclusion. Because they were Gentiles they needed to be properly cleansed of any defilement and made ready for entry into the society of God's people.

And so, verse 24, "They burned the city with fire and all that was in it except silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron...don't burn so...they took that and put it in the treasury of the house of the Lord. And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive and her father's household and all that she had and she dwells in Israel even unto this day," which shows that the book f Joshua wasn't written very long after this incident for Rahab was still alive, "because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho."

Now here's a marvelous story. God comes in to judge a society. He comes in to destroy an entire city, but He spares a woman of faith even though she was equal to the worst sinner in the city, she was a prostitute. It was that kind of life style which brought about the judgment of God on the Canaanites and on the city of Jericho, yet this woman escapes that judgment because she was a sinner who believed in the true God. And that's the essence of the gospel, isn't it? All of us are equally worthy of the judgment of God, some of us by His grace exercise true faith and are spared that deserved judgment.

Two things we need to see in this story and I just call them briefly to your attention...two things. One is the punishment of sin, the punishment of sin. If any city was ever a city of destruction, Jericho was. That city and everything in it were devoted to destruction. There was no escape and frankly there was very little warning. Young and old, one day in possession of wealth, one day in possession of ease and comfort and the next day captured and absolutely destroyed. Now that is a picture of the reality of the penalty of sin.

Israel was God's chosen people and the nation of Canaan was His rejected because of their immorality and godless abandon to sin and because they would not believe in the true God. The nation was characterized by vice, atrocities. Sex was a part of their worship. Babies were buried alive. Horrible orgies took place. They were a cancer on human society. And it was not only an act of God's judgment but it was an act of God's mercy on human civilization to remove such a cancer. In fact, one historian said the destruction of the Canaanites was as great a gain to the welfare of humanity from a purely social view as any other way. The cruelties and abominations of heathenism practiced by those people required punishment and resulted in a deserved destruction. And the point is, God punishes sin. There's no true more certainly undeniable than that true...God punishes sin. The eating of any forbidden fruit always has the penalty, the loss of Eden and the presence of judgment. The Canaanites were destroyed, their lives were lost. Anybody who thinks that God won't do that to sinners is wrong, in fact it is a blasphemy to think that God can sit still and see with an indifferent eye the poison of sin working its horror in the world, He can't. In fact, God must act against sin, He must. He does it because sinners are worthy of it and He does it because saints need to be preserved from it.

He knew that the Israelites and the Canaanites could never live together to His glory. So it was God's love for His redeemed people that made Him a consuming fire against those who would have polluted His people. There are many people, I guess, that we could say are like Jericho. They live fat, they live secure in their walled city that they themselves have built, rejecting God, rejecting Christ, living in sin and they are really fools waiting to see the crash of God's judgment which is inevitable...inevitable.

Adam Duran tells the story of a man in the open country of Scotland. And one day the man was looking into the sky and he was watching an eagle soaring around. That eagle would mound into the

sky on its mighty wings and it was a magnificent sight. And then as he continued to watch that eagle, he was amazed because something was wrong. The king of birds didn't continue to rise into the sky with the same power and speed and at first its flight began to be somewhat hampered and then it came to a stop and then it helplessly started to flutter and then the great bird fell like a rock out of the sky and crashed to the ground right in front of the wanderer's feet. Looking closely the man saw that the eagle was dead and searching still closer he observed that a small weasel which the eagle had taken for its own food as it ascended with that weasel in its claws, the weasel had dug its own claws into the abdomen of the great bird and the splendid eagle, as it soared upward trying to escape, was having its life blood drained away. A picture of the sinner who thinks he soars when in fact sin is literally bleeding him to death and the judgment of God absolutely inevitable. When a man thinks he flies the highest, sin is draining his life blood and he is doomed to a tragic death.

If you've ever studied history you will remember a horrible and diabolical invention called the "virgin's kiss." It was used by the fathers of the Inquisition. A victim who was to be punished for denying the faith, quote/unquote, was pushed forward to kiss and image and as the victim approach to kiss the image, all at once the arms of the image embraced that victim in its arms and pulled it toward itself and a hundred hidden knives appeared to bring about instant death. Such is the virgin's kiss of sin. The sinful joys of the flesh lead even in this world to results that are so terrible and so frightening that if men could see those results they would run from sin with all their passion.

And so, in Jericho we see the judgment of God on sin. The horrors of sin are only exceeded by the horrors of judgment.

I read one time about a pagan artisan who crafted goblets and things and he crafted a certain goblet in the bottom of which he fixed the face of a serpent. And it was actually sculpted inside the bottom of the goblet, coiled for the cruel spring, a pair of burning eyes in its head, its fangs ready to strike, it lay beneath the ruby wine. The cup was made of gold and beautifully done at that. Never did the thirsty man who lifted the cup to quench his thirst and taste the delicious liquid suspect that laying below that when he reached the dregs would be a head that rose and gleamed with terror and menace before his startled eyes.

And I thought about sin and how men look at the brimming cup of temptation and sin and they see it only as something to welcome until they have drunk it to its dregs and there is the serpent ready to bring about a deadly sting.

And so, in Jericho they thought they were drinking the cup of pleasure and when it was empty they found only judgment...only judgment. The first thing then we see in the story of Rahab is judgment on sin. The penalty is so sudden and so complete, it shocked that whole city and to be truthful and they were dead before they could react.

But there's a second thing in the story. Not only the punishment of sin but secondly, the power of faith...the power of faith. What a beautiful example of saving faith. A prostitute, a professional deviate, a woman of the worst order came to believe in the true God, so much so that she put her life on the line. She is a fascinating woman to me. She had no spiritual advantages. She knew no Sabbath days. She had no Scriptures, no teachers. She lived in a vile, pagan city. She had the heart of a prostitute. She was, though, in spite of all of that like some beautiful pearl lying within the rough ugly shell somewhere in the weeds and rocks at the bottom of the sea. But God could see all the debris to the true faith and her true faith drew her to the truth of God, drew her to accept the warnings of God, to fear the judgment of God, to long to be spared by God's mercy. And her faith is most seen in the statement that she made, "I know that the Lord has given you the land and I know that the Lord God is supreme."

Now if it's true faith, true faith can stand a test, right? And her faith was tested. She had to put her faith to work. She had to be willing to put her life on the line. And she was willing. This was not fair-weather faith. This was faith that was tested. You see, what distinguished Rahab from the rest of the crowd in Jericho was not her superior morality...no. It was not her higher intelligence, it wasn't her more exemplary life, it wasn't her better disposition, it was simply her...what?...her faith. The message that we find here is that God judges sinners but spares those who believe in Him. That's the simplicity of the gospel. And their believing is a believing that is tested that willingly pays the price. That was her faith. She is the beautiful model of the simplicity of faith. Her faith acts in that she hung a red cord out the window to identify her house.

You know, it's not our good deeds and every Bible teacher who has ever studied the Old Testament sees in the color of that cord the symbol of...what?...the blood of Christ. But I look backwards, most look at the scarlet cord and look forward to the blood of Christ, I look at the scarlet cord and look backwards to the exodus and just before that when God came with the angel of death to kill all the firstborn and said if you're going to be spared you need to put on your doorpost and lintel...what?...blood. The scarlet blood on the door was the symbol of the coming Savior whose blood would save sinners who believed. And so the children of Israel put it on their doorposts and here is a woman who in the same kind of symbolism puts a scarlet cord out her window, again another symbol of another analogy too the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The red cord becomes the sign, in a sense, of Rahab's faith, just as the red stream of Christ's blood is the only thing that God recognizes for the cleansing of sin and salvation, so the soldiers would recognize that red cord and the fact that she was to be spared.

Some months ago there was an article printed in a national magazine that said, "I do not know believe in the blood of Christ." That magazine was sent out all over the country. And we have received uncounted numbers of letters, they come every day and have for the last couple months saying, "How in the world can you not believe in the blood of Christ?" I have received letters from

pastors, from laymen, from students, from radio listeners, people who have received tapes through the years, from friends, from enemies, and all of them asking...How is it that you don't believe in the blood of Christ?

You may have heard that because it's flying around, I suppose, twenty other papers that churches put out or people put out on their own have reprinted that same thing. In fact, the other day I saw about a hundred-page book on the heresy of John MacArthur regarding the blood of Christ. And I just think I need to tell you that I believe in the precious blood of Jesus Christ and I think if you know anything about me and you've been here at all, you know that. It just kind of hurts because if there's any one thing that the faithful preacher of the Word of God upholds is the sacrificial death of Christ. And what I've tried to say in responding to all these letters, find myself responding every single day to another one, is basically that this is not true, that I believe that what Peter said about the precious blood of Christ is true. His blood is precious because it was poured out in death for my sin and yours. And I would never deny that. But just in case someone poses that question to you, you can tell them that I believe in the blood of Christ.

Dr. Sweeting asked me this afternoon about it, he said, "I have been getting letters saying that you don't believe in the blood of Christ. I know that's not true, what's going on?"

Well, I guess this is the way it is when you're in the ministry. I suppose it would be one thing to be attacked by outsiders but when people who call themselves your brothers do that, it's kind of painful. But I just want you to know if anybody asks you that I believe Jesus Christ shed His precious blood literally on the cross for your sin and mine and the sins of the world. There's never been any question in my mind about that. And every time I get a little bit discouraged about that, I remember the misrepresentation of the prophets, the apostles and the Lord Jesus Himself and I remind myself of Hebrews 12 which says, "You haven't yet suffered unto blood." You're still alive, you haven't been martyred unjustly. And I thank God, I guess, for the privilege of suffering unjustly, it sort of identifies me with Christ who suffered unjustly.

But when I come to a time, as we come now, I'm going to ask the men to come and pass the cup, this is a very sacred time to me because as I hold that cup in my hand my mind sees the blood of Christ shed for me, shed for you. I have never questioned that. No one could read the Bible and question that. And I am thankful to God that Jesus Christ poured His life blood out in death on the cross on my behalf, and I know you are as well. This is the point of our salvation. You see, if He had just become the bread and become man but never poured out His blood, there wouldn't be no salvation. So He became man and died and the shedding of His blood was the symbol of His sacrificial death.

Yes, God punishes sin but God saves sinners who believe. That's the simple truth of the story of Rahab and that's the simple truth of the story of every man who comes to Jesus Christ. And, beloved, that's why we're here, because we celebrate the simplicity of this marvelous, marvelous reality. We

are saved not because we have anything in ourselves, but because we have believed unto salvation though we are unworthy sinners. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, thank You for the simple, beautiful story of this very special woman, a woman by every human standard unworthy, really by every divine standard equally unworthy, a woman who should have been judged along with her evil civilization, a prostitute. O Lord, how joyous it is to see that You saved her not because of what she was but because of who she believed in. May we know, O God, that our salvation is by faith and by faith alone, but a faith that can stand the test and pay the price and obey. And, Lord, thank You for giving us even that faith. We bless You for the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for the remission of sin, for the scarlet stream that flowed from His side, from His wounds, from His head, an outpouring of love, an outpouring of wrath, death for those who would believe. We thank You, Father, that in Christ there is forgiveness, even for the unworthy such as we are.

And now, Lord, as we come to Your table we ask that You would help us, help us to see the meaning of the cross all over again. And, Lord, if there's anyone in this place tonight who has not received Jesus Christ, who has not believed in Him as Lord and Savior, may they do that this moment. May they open their heart and receive the Son of God, accepting His death and resurrection as the only means to escape judgment and enjoy the blessings of eternal salvation.

Father, we pray also for those of us who have received Christ that we might be cleansed in this moment from any sin. We can be certain that Rahab through faith, through being identified with the people of God walked away from the sorted life of the past, eventually was included in the Messianic line. O Father, may it be that those of us who have placed faith in Jesus Christ too walk away from the sorted past and leave behind any sin and stain. Help us to confess now any known sin that we might truly celebrate Your death with a clean heart.

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