

Rahab's Risk
Courageous Series Week 3
Joshua 2
September 11, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision

This is our third week in a seven-week series called Courageous, we're looking at a character in the Bible who was told by God to be strong and courageous and then he is!

And so we're looking at his story and talking about how WE might live lives of every-day courage

And it's worth it to cultivate courage in our hearts because as we've said the past few weeks, we feel most alive and are our best selves when we're living courageously—we like us the best when we know that we're living strong and courageous

This is true for all of us, whether you'd call yourself a Christian or not, whether you believe any of the songs we've been singing this morning or not,
all of us feel most alive and our best selves when we're living strong and courageous lives

And we believe as Christians that God has made us in his image to live lives that are marked by courage, not fear or comfort

We're not some Hollywood-ized version of courage, we're talking about YOU, living courageously in every-day decisions and situations, with your personality and gifts and temperament

And we talked last week about how the right people around us can help us
ALL of us will face situations where we don't naturally feel strong and courageous

And having the right people can make all the difference because they can share courage capital when our courage resources fall short of what we need for any given situation

The right people can make the difference between living a life of courage, or settling for a life of fear or comfort instead.

And today we're going to look at a story in Joshua chapter 2 where we're going to see that what that RIGHT person looks like isn't always as simple or obvious or straight-forward as it sounds

And if we're too closed off, too narrow in what the right person needs to look like, we might just miss the person God has sent our way to help us when we need it the most!

Bible/no Bible on the screen behind me:

Joshua and the people Israel have been wandering in the desert for 40 years and now they're getting ready to enter into the land God has promised them
and here's what Joshua does as they're getting ready to cross into the land:

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim [Gotta be careful how you say that in church!]. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho."

Okay, so some of us have a problem we might need to confess here at the outset

And the problem that we're talking about is control-freak-ness.

Some of us are high control people, aren't we? If you're not sure, ask the person sitting next to you, they'll be glad to help you I'm sure

Here's a hint: You know you're a control freak if your idea of partnering with other people looks like you do it while they watch you! Dead give-away!

In some areas of my life I'm a recovering control-aholic

If you're a little bit or a lot bit of a control-aholic, here's why I think it's worth it for you to enter into control rehab:

because a high need for control is always rooted in and covered in a very deep and powerful emotion underneath that need for control and that is ***fear***.

Wherever the need for CONTROL dominates a person or a work-place or a family or a religious setting, FEAR is never far behind, is it?

And the problem with FEAR driving us is we're not our best selves when we're living fearfully. You are your best you when you're living a COURAGEOUS life, not a FEARFUL life

And so I want to propose to you that if you're a control freak one of the most important internal-world battles that you could fight is to replace your FEAR-based need for control
With a faith-based courage.

In the first chapter of Joshua, God had promised Joshua that he would give him the promised land in no uncertain terms: "I'm going to give you every place you set your foot, Joshua, I promise"

So God has made this promise to Joshua, and the question for Joshua is how does he live in light of God's promises in real-life, in real-time?

Is Joshua sending spies into the land out of a fear-based need for control, to evaluate and mitigate against any risk and make sure that they can actually take the Land that God has promised them?

This question hangs over this part of the Joshua story in a particular way as he send spies into the land to check it out because they did this 40 years earlier and it turned out to be their undoing!

They sent 12 spies into the land to spy out the land

ten of them came back and said the land is great but the people who live there are too powerful, we'll never take them, we don't care what God has said to us

So they wandered for those 40 years until this moment comes again

And this time Joshua's the one in charge and he only sends 2 spies, but still the question remains: is this just the control-freak coming out?

Or put another way: ***what's the appropriate work of the people of God in relation to the promises of God?***

On the whole, it would seem that this is a 2-step process:

1. *Pre-deciding God's promises are true.*

Given what happened last time, I'm pretty sure that Joshua had a pre-conversation with these 2 spies.

And I'm pretty sure it went something like this: don't blow it like they did last time!

Your job is NOT to decide IF we can take this land. Your job is to help us to figure out HOW God is going to deliver it into our hands.

This is not an exploration of God's promises, this is an exploration that has pre-committed to acting on those promises.

We have a work to do spiritually and emotionally and often times as a community to declare God's promises to one another, to encourage one another to be strong and courageous and to step into those promises

And the first step is that work of trusting, pre-deciding at the outset of a situation, that God is, has been, and will be faithful to his promises and then embrace this reality:

2. *the promises of God are typically delivered on in the context of the strong and courageous actions of his people...*

That is to say, most of the promises of God are NOT delivered to us while we just sit around and eat bon-bons and watch Price is Right re-runs all day

For the most part, God does not simply do miraculous things apart from some participation or cooperation on our part...EXCEPT for those times when he DOES!

And those times when God DOES do that are the experiences or stories that get circulated on the internet and that get talked about the most in the Bible or in sermons like this

But for the most part it's important to see that this is how God works: through the courageous and faithful actions of his people.

Joshua sends spies to explore not IF God is going to deliver on his promises but HOW God is going to deliver on his promises

See, the trick is, you can send spies into the land as a control freak. Or you can send spies into the land from a heart that is strong and courageous.

And it looks exactly the same on the outside, but who you're becoming UNDERNEATH the activity is totally different.

You can discipline your kids from a fearful and controlling heart or from a heart that is strong and courageous:

it might look the same on the outside but who you're becoming underneath that activity is totally different

You can have that hard conversation with your mother or your boss or your co-worker from a fearful heart and controlling heart

Or you can have it from a heart that is strong and courageous: it might look exactly the same on the outside, but who you're becoming underneath the activity is totally different

You can explore and ask really important questions about that new job or that non-profit from a fearful and controlling heart that wants to mitigate against all kinds of risks

OR you can do that research from a heart that is strong and courageous: you're doing the same thing, but who you're becoming is entirely different

All of us, whether you're a control freak or not, are called to take strong and courageous steps of faith!

As someone in my small group said this week, God's given you a brain, use it!

He's given you a vision or a passion or a responsibility or a kid or a spouse or a home: chase after it, take care of it, do what you should do to protect it!

Be strong and courageous and take wise and creative steps

Because the promises of God are typically delivered on in the context of the faith-filled actions of his people

But here's the third piece to it that's the kicker:

3. ...that prayerfully embraces and acknowledges the limits of what we can accomplish in our own strength.

Control freaks, we all have limits.

And our work is to partner with God where we have work to do and then to be still and know that he is God when we reach the boundaries of what we have control over

Joshua is neither going to sit back and wait for God to do everything NOR is he going to take God's promises and run off with it, thinking that it's now all on him to go and make it all happen

And we're called to NEITHER just waiting around for God to do everything NOR to going into hyper-drive control-freak mode and just rolling up our sleeves and getting everything done ourselves

Courageous living means walking with the Spirit of God who calls us to live right in the middle of this tension

So Joshua sends these two spies into the land and here's how their story unfolds:

So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

Now why the spies went here has been a source of endless debate among Bible nerds over the centuries.

There are obvious reasons why a couple of guys might go to a prostitutes house but many doubt it would have been recorded here in the Bible if that was what they were looking for

There's some line of thinking that this is likely more of a bar and that's where you'd go if you were spies looking to get a pulse on the mood of the people in the city

But any rate, you've got Shittim and a prostitute all on one Sunday morning, for some of you that makes this the most interesting message you've ever heard on a Sunday morning

² The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." ³ 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."

So the king gets word of the spies in the town and he knows where they went, so the king of the nation sends word to this woman who's likely on the fringes in the seedy part of town, "send those spies to me!"

⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. ⁵ At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went."

Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.”⁶ (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)⁷ 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 gone out, the gate was shut.

So the king of the nation comes to this woman: “send out these spies who have come to destroy us”

and in one of the greatest displays of courage in the Scriptures covers for them and sends the king's men on a wild goose chase

We talked last week about how a life of courage often requires the right people around us

And this morning, with this passage, it's important to recognize that sometimes who the right person is comes in a surprising package.

Sometimes the right person doesn't LOOK like the right person initially—like Rahab the prostitute; sometimes the right person is someone you would have never picked yourself, not on a million years.

But the funny thing is, throughout the Scriptures God uses all kinds of unexpected, surprising people to facilitate his work going forward in people's lives

And so this morning, almost as a P.S. to last week's message

I want to encourage you to pray and look for and position yourself to be in relationships that are the RIGHT people who will help you to be strong and courageous when you need it the most

AND at the same time, I want to encourage you to remain open to how God might be surprising you with the occasional unlikely partner in the work that he's laid out for you.

In fact, to show you how wonderfully surprising and how wonderfully BIG God's redemptive story is, and how much he loves to surprise us with the RIGHT people who don't initially LOOK like the right people

Let me tell you how Rahab's story unfolds: spoiler alert, the Israelites take the city and Rahab gets spared and we don't hear from her again for the whole rest of the Old Testament

But then out of NOWHERE she appears in the new testament book of Matthew.

And in the first chapter of Matthew, Matthew introduces the birth of Jesus with one of those long and boring lists of genealogies that you tend to skim over if you're a Bible person

But right smack dab in the middle of this genealogy of the man that Matthew is going to declare to his readers is the Son of God and the hope of the whole world, you know who appears?
RAHAB!

***5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
6 and Jesse the father of King David. -Matthew 1]***

Rahab is the great-great grandmother of King David, the most famous king of Israel!

And from there, there's a **straight line to Jesus Christ himself**; this woman who gets introduced here as a prostitute

is the great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandmother of the savior of the world!

That's how big and great and ginormous and generous God's story of redemption is: it gathers up all kinds of people with all kinds of stories and grafts and weaves them into one big, beautiful, messy, glorious story of redemption, love, healing, and grace.

And that means that YOU and I are invited into this grand wonderful story, no matter what your life has looked like to this point.

Rahab then explains the reason why she's doing this whole thing, and what she says here is going to open up the elephant in the room for some of us as we engage with this whole story of Joshua

8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof⁹ and said to them, "I know that the Lord has given you this land 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.

10 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 Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

Last week I got a very good and thoughtful email asking the question that I'm sure is haunting at least some of you as we dig into this story: what do we do with all this violence, right?

What do we do with the fact that God is essentially saying to Joshua,

"I'm going to give you this promised land by having YOU take it away from and destroy all the people who are already there?"

And today of all days is the perfect day to talk about violence in the name of religion, it is September 11th after all.

And we cannot sit here on September 11th and say that violence in the name of religion has primarily been perpetuated by other religions while we remain the good guys

Christians have used stories like these throughout history to perpetuate what they believed to be God-sanctioned violence and atrocities

So how do we in good conscience read and understand this portion of Scripture and all that is going to unfold here?

How do we understand the side of God that we see here and how do we come to terms with how he's working and what he's instructing his people to do?

This is probably a five week series of messages, not just a five minute slice.

And there is NO silver bullet here, no one explanation that makes sense of everything with a just a few statements and we can move on

But let me see if I can at least take a couple of swipes at this and I'll be glad to have follow-up conversations with those of you who need more to be able to enter into the rest of this series.

And Steve did a really good job taking a crack at this this past week in our daily Connect Devotional with some links to some good and thoughtful articles.

If you're not getting our 5-day-a-week devotional yet, fill out your Connection Card in the bulletin and let us know and we'll add you to that email distribution list

To start to understand what's happening here, we've got to go back about 500 years to when God first called his people through a man named Abraham.

And what he says to Abraham is that God is going to make him and his family into a great and mighty nation and through that nation all the people's on earth are going to be blessed

But then God says this about what's going to happen to his family before they get there:

"Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there ...¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."
-Genesis 15:13, 16

Okay, so if you were with us a couple January's ago, you might remember that we looked at the story of Exodus, how the Israelites were a slave nation in Egypt for how long? 400 years!

And so here we get the prophesy of that and THEN, God says to Abraham, your descendants will come back here to this land where Abraham is and THEN they'll get this land

And why do they have to wait 400 years in slavery before they can get the land God promised them? The sin of the Amorites isn't yet complete

God is going to work with the Amorites, be patient with the Amorites, work with Amorites, invite them to turn from their sin for 400 years!

and God will not move one day too soon to execute his judgment on them

EVEN if that means that his own people have to groan in slavery for 400 years for that time to come to fruition

If the sin of the Amorites means what it tends to mean when God talks about judging the nations

it includes worshiping false gods which sometimes meant temple prostitution, sometimes that meant very young little girls trafficked and used as sex slaves in the temples
Sometimes it meant child sacrifices

It most certainly included issues that we would call social justice: exploiting the poor and the widows, using and exploiting the people who don't have the power to resist like orphans

This does not mean that it's as simple as Israel was always good and the other guys were always bad

Israel wasn't always purely motivated in their motivations but the reality is that God is at work to judge the people, even when Israel's motives are off.

And Israel themselves are not exempt from this level of judgment.

Hundreds of years after Joshua takes this land, it gets taken away from the Israelites because they, too, have reached the full measure of THEIR sins

So it's helpful for us as we wrestle with this story and other stories that **God is not eager to recreationally wipe innocent people groups out**

that there are bigger things happening here with God's judgment that have to do with the actions and the sins of the people involved in all of this

Another thing that helps me as I wrestle with all of this that's kind of a springboard off of that is to remember that **we don't know what kinds of things God has done to try to call people to himself**

during those 400 years, how is God at work calling the Amorites to himself? We don't know.

The Old Testament is the story of God's work on the earth through one people group, the Jewish nation

The Scriptures say that the Jewish people are the chosen people and that they are the primary way that God was acting and moving during this period to communicate his nature to the rest of the nations

But throughout the Old Testament we catch glimpses of that God at work in other nations or people-groups that we don't get the back-story on

For example, Moses's father-in-law was a priest at Midian, not an Israelite, who blesses the Lord when he hears about all that God has done to free the Israelites from Egyptian slavery

How many priests in Midian were pointing people to the God of Israel? We don't know.

But it's a picture of someone who is a priest who obviously knows this God and who is at work in another culture, in another country, part of God's bigger work all around that we don't get the full story of

In Genesis 14, we get a man named Melchizedek, he's called king of Salem and a priest of God Most High and he blesses Abraham in the name of the Lord

And Abraham gives him a tenth of his spoils after a major battle with neighboring kings!

Who is this guy that someone as great and holy as Abraham would give him 10%, and why is he called a priest of God most high? We don't know!

But again, it's a picture of a priest who's not Jewish, not a part of Abraham's family who obviously knows the Lord and who God is working through and speaking through to the people of Salem.

We get more help from the **story of Jonah**.

If you were a Sunday school kid, you might remember that Jonah was a prophet sent to the people of Nineveh to call them to turn away from their wicked ways

He's one of the only Jewish prophets that we get record of going to another country and speaking God's words to them, all the rest of the prophets were sent to the Jewish people to call THEM to follow God's ways.

But what if he's not abnormal? What if that sort of thing happened all the time? The story isn't written as if it's the only time God ever did this.

Jonah's not happy about it, but it's not like he's saying stuff like "Nobody's ever done this before, why do I have to do it now?" Jonah is sent to a neighboring country to call them to follow the God of the universe and they do so!

Perhaps that kind of thing happened with some degree of regularity

Finally, I look to Jesus. Two things are true: first, **Jesus is not afraid to speak harsh words of truth and judgment**.

But Jesus pronounces some of the harshest statements and gives some of the most severe warnings in the whole Bible.

But the other thing that we see in Jesus is that he goes to the cross and in the most significant actions in all of history, **he absorbs sin, injustice and God's judgment on himself**.

The Scriptures declare that EVERY sin, every rebellion for all time from every single human being all throughout history was laid on him

And that God's justice is satisfied by Jesus as he absorbs and takes on all our sin at the cross and then overcomes it by his victory over the grave.

So that now, on the other side of that cross, God's people do NOT engage in Holy War any more.

Jesus on the cross replaced holy war with his own sacrificial death
so that those of us who are called by his name get the privilege of proclaiming peace to anyone who would listen and to be instruments of reconciliation rather than judgment on this world

That doesn't answer all the questions, again, this could be a 5-week series and maybe we'll come back to it at some point

But hopefully that helps us to get a handle on the issue of violence in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament

I want to close this morning with another look at what Rahab says to the spies because in this story SHE's the one that's courageous

"I know that the Lord has given you this land... ¹¹our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Steve Tamayo pointed out last week as we were talking about this passage that Rahab in this little speech to the spies demonstrates remarkable and **multiple levels of awareness**.

She's of course aware of **her own city and the mood of the people**. She's aware of **her king and his armies**. She's likely aware of **her own cities gods**.

She's ALSO aware of **what Israel has done**: how they conquered other peoples and cities. And she's very aware that her city is likely to be next!

But the thing that she's most aware of that fuels her to be strong and courageous is **the Lord**.

"I know" she says, "the Lord has ALREADY given you this land!" And then she says to the spies, "the Lord your God is God in heaven above and the earth below."

In hiding the spies, Rahab is not just switching her allegiances from her own people to the people of Israel because they have this massive intimidating army.

They don't! They're a rag-tag group of nomads who don't have chariots or horses, they're not bearing down on Jericho with a great army! They are bearing down on Jericho with a great GOD!

And so in hiding the spies Rahab is casting her lot in with God who is Lord over heaven and earth, she is trusting in and aware of the God is over and behind the people of Israel

And THAT is what frames up her whole situation and gives her the power to be strong and courageous

In our own lives, we tend to be very focused on our circumstances and situations and challenges here on earth

But if we can cultivate an awareness of the God who is Lord OVER those circumstances, what it can do is fuel us into a life that is strong and courageous.

This is a story that is PACKED with all kinds of fuel for a strong and courageous life, pick one to pray about and wrestle with this week:

- 1. Recovering control-freaks: what would it look like to take wise action from a 'strong and courageous' place rather than from a heart that is fearful and grasping for control?***
- 2. How open are you to "right people" surprises?***
- 3. Think about a situation where you need courage: how does awareness of the Lord over that situation help you to be strong and courageous?***