

Good Morning Damascus Road!

This has been a busy week. Sam and I spent the first three days being trained in some new discipleship material (which you will be hearing more about later), and then ended the week with Acts29 boot camp, with Sam assessing potential church planters. All of this to say, as we dig into Joshua, let's fight the easy default of viewing God's mission as something that happened, and remember that it is something that is happening. We are part of the Acts29 church planting network. There are 28 chapters in the book of Acts. So we are not looking back on just to see what God has done. We look back to remind us that the same God who leads the Israelites, is the God-man Jesus Christ who reconciled us to Himself at the cross, and the same God who dwells in us spurring us on to mission.

So let's get going. Please grab your Bibles and open them to Joshua chapter two.

We have spent the last few weeks introducing Joshua the man and getting the Israelites ready to enter the land, and you would assume that this chapter would take the next step. It would make sense to move forward with the narrative of how the people move into the land that God has promised them. But chapter two takes us in a different direction. The Bible does something here that has become a very popular trick of screenwriters and storytellers: to break into the main story arc in order to reveal to us another truth in a different way.

In this case, we will move from the big picture of The Nation of Israel, and instead invest some time in the story of two spies and a Canaanite harlot, which in some ways sounds like the beginning of a bad joke. But this story is much more than a bad joke. In fact, I would venture to say that the story of Rahab is the one of the clearest and descriptions of salvation (both justification and sanctification) found in the OT. But we'll get there. Let's start in the text.

Joshua 2, starting in v.1

*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. 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 do 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.*

So the story goes this way, Joshua sends two spies to into Jericho. They go the house of a prostitute named Rahab. The king finds out that they are there, sends soldiers. Rahab lies and tells them that she didn't know who they were, so she sent them away. She tells the soldiers to go get them, all the time, the Israelite spies are hiding on the roof. So the soldiers pursue the spies, and close the gate behind them.

Now, some details seem to be missing from this story. Here are a few things that, for whatever reason are left out:

1. The Israelites are camped on the other side of the Jordan river. So somehow these spies got across the Jordan, which is no babbling brook.
2. Somehow the spies got into Jericho, the most fortified city of its day.
3. Somehow the king finds out the men are in the city.
4. Somehow the men end up at the house of Rahab, a prostitute.
5. Somehow the king knows that they are at her house specifically.

The reason I bring the missing details up are a great deal of the commentaries that I read on this chapter are focused on deducing the details that God doesn't seem interested in revealing to us. I say this because I don't think that this is a tendency only of commentary writers. Too often our approach to the Bible is to find answers to the questions that we have, rather than simply sitting in the answers that God has chosen to give us. If we truly believe that the Bible is both inerrant (meaning fully true and free from error), and

sufficient (meaning God has included everything we need to know) than we must spend our time searching out the things God felt we needed to know, rather than the things He purposely veiled or didn't include at all. And this does not just include the details of OT stories. This includes trying to decipher the last days, the exact age of the earth, or trying to make the mysterious of God less mysterious. We need to get away from trying to make God's Word palatable and accept it as He reveals it. We have more in our Bible than we can fully explore in our lifetime, let's not get sidetracked. 1 Timothy 1.4 reminds us:

*not to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.*

I say this because it is a bad stewardship of our hearts and minds, but also because it can lead to bad theology. And in this section, I think it is possible to draw all sorts of conclusions that sound interesting, may be true, but also may not. We must look past what is not here to what is, if we are going to draw from the story what God has for us.

So what details does the Bible see fit to give us. Well, this first portion of the story seems most concerned with introducing us to the characters and moving the story along to get to the meat. We have two spies, who are never named and really do little but hide and respond. The person initiating the action is a Canaanite prostitute by the name of Rahab. Now Rahab would not be the chosen hero in most stories, certainly not a Jewish story. She would have been looked down upon based on the fact that she was a Gentile, but specifically belonged to a city that was devoted to destruction (Joshua 6.21) by the Lord. But she would be looked down on for much more than simply the city she lived in...SHE WAS A PROSTITUTE. She was the worst of society. And yet, it is her hands that the lives of these poor spies dangles. It is Rahab who holds the key to their deliverance or destruction. All she has to do is tell the king that the men are on the roof, and she would be out of harms way and in the good graces of the king. She would be a patriot, who helped rescue her city from the destruction. BUT SHE DOESN'T. She lies to the king in order to protect the spies, the enemies of her country. WHY? She fears God!

So now we get to the heart of the story, which lies in the words that flow from the lips of this despised woman. Jumping back into the chapter at verse 8, we read:

*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 Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. 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."*

This is a very confusing section, for Rahab seems to have two thoughts in mind. The first might sound familiar. It is concern for herself and her family. Rahab sees imminent death and begs the spies to spare the lives of her and her family. She makes a deal, her life for theirs. And I have to admit, this seems a little self centered. It seems self serving. And we might be quick to judge her if the Bible did not speak of her again. If this story was the only place that we ever heard the name of Rahab mentioned, than we might decide that she was simply looking out for herself, and God used her sinful actions to accomplish his task. Rahab's name is mentioned though. We do not have the luxury of drawing our own conclusion...the Bible draws them for us. In Hebrews 11 (the ByFaith chapter), the great roll call of faithful characters, Rahab is mentioned, in verse 31 it says,

*By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.*

So what is it that sets her apart? It is her faith. Rahab is certainly concerned with the welfare of herself and her family, but she is more concerned with an all powerful God. The faith of Rahab does not mix words in her declaration of who God is. This is a bold faith. A faith that does not say if, but when. A faith that looks at what God has done

(v.10) in awe. Rahab has heard what God has done, and is filled with fear. This fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, as the writer of Proverbs tells us. This fear is not the culmination of our faith, it is the beginning. Faith does not end when we recognize what God has done. Faith is not just acknowledging the things we can see and understand. Hebrews 11 reminds us of this in v.1.

*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

And this is what makes Rahab's faith bold. It is not that she has seen what God has done, as many of the people in Jericho have heard of this and been struck with fear. What sets her apart is the way that she talks about the things that are to come. Her first statement in v.9, *I know that the Lord has given you the land*, is one of the most remarkable statements ever made once you look at the context with which they were said.

At this moment, the spies are trapped in the city of Jericho. Their army is on the other side of the Jordan, and there is no bridge. The city of Jericho is one of the most fortified cities ever constructed, and Rahab would know this since she lived IN THE WALL. And yet she is entirely convinced that the city will be taken. Contrast this to God's own people, who after seeing the people of Canaan wanted to roll over and die, not trusting the God who had just led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and across the desert.

### **SLOW DOWN**

Contrast this with you or I, who read the numerous promises of God, and yet doubt if He will come through. Knowing that God has told us He will never leave us, yet feeling like He is so far away. And believing that God is enough, as long as the problem doesn't involve money, relationships, or social standing. Yet here is Rahab recognizing not just what God has done, but His power to continue doing it.

Rahab's faith was not just bold, but it was active. The writer of James reminds us that a faith without works is dead. Not sick...dead. And Rahab certainly had the option of not acting. As a matter of fact, that would have been the easier option. For this reason, James 2.25 uses Rahab as an example of an active faith.

*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

Faith requires sacrifice. To believe something means we don't believe something else. And to believe in God means that we put things that are more comfortable, make more sense, or stir our affections more easily aside. To have an active faith means we do the same with our actions. If we decide that we are going to be faithful to God, it means that we might be required to act against our rationality, reality, or even our own morality. We see this in the story of Rahab:

She acts against rationality by taking a risk that is well outside of what most of us would consider reasonable. To lie to the king is treason. If they came back to her home and found the spies there, her life would be done. But she doesn't blink. She fears God more than she fears men!

Rahab acts against her own personal reality by betraying her people. She takes this risk in order to save spies of the army that is coming to attack her city. She does not put her roots into those things that she knows and understands. She loves God more than she loves others!

And she acts against personal morality by lying. Now this has become a matter of conflict for people reading the story of Rahab. How can we condone her lying? How can a God who has told us not to bear false witness, also call faithful one who has lied? And this paradox will be one that we face many times before we get out of the book of Joshua. Through the rest of this book, we will see the Israelites kill women and children in the name of God, stone a whole family of their own country, and many other details that will make our hair stand up on end and want to make us cry out, NO. This is not the God that I grew up with, have come to know, and have come to terms with. This is a God who is not so easily defined. Who creates situations that do not fit into the matrix that I have concocted from Sunday School lessons.

And I'll be honest, I had God figured out until I became a pastor. Things basically made sense and I could give an adequate biblical answer to most situations. But as I began to dig in and fight WITH people, FOR God, it became a little more difficult. The answers were not as cut and dry. It didn't come down to an easily spouted verse as much as it did a daily pursuit for God's glory. It became less about what to abstain from, and much more about what we should pursue. Living for God is not always black and white. There is a grey area, and it is in the area that we find Rahab. She is not concerned with her own piety, but instead with God's glory. She trusts in God more than she trusts in her understanding of God.

**REPEAT THAT LINE**

Now, I want to make sure that I haven't just created an excuse to sin. I am not saying that we should do whatever we want, and pray that God will redeem it. Instead, I am talking about seeking God so completely that His glory is first and foremost on our minds. So instead of justifying our sin, we live an active faith that does the opposite; it puts a question mark on ALL actions. It takes both the things that we have deemed good, and the things that we have counted bad and views them in line with God's glory. It means the good things we do can be just as tainted with sin as the bad. It makes every action an issue of discernment. It makes all of life a struggle to deny ourselves and seek God. It makes every minute an opportunity, no matter what we are doing, *whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* This is the tension that we live in. The Christian life is not about not sinning. It is about viewing all things: both sin and good works, through the lens of a HOLY GOD!

Rahab had a bold faith. She had an active faith. But she also had a changing faith. Rahab did not ask the spies to save her so that she could continue being a prostitute in Jericho. The biggest risk that she was about to take was giving up the life that she had known. She realized that it was not possible to continue living in the life that she had. A change was required. And so, she chose God over Rahab. She gave up her old life. She did not ask God to love her as she was, so she could remain there, but out of who He was, *he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.* And coming face to face with the God of the universe demands change. The faith of Rahab was sanctifying, in that, at seeing who God was, she realized that she was going to have to confront Him. So she did! And when

the walls of Jericho came down, only one part remained, and it contained Rahab and her family. And while she was saved from destruction, she was also saved to a new life. She joined the Israelites, was grafted in to a new family, and married a man of some nobility named Salmon. We know this because it is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1.

*Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.*

And this verse is part of the lineage of Jesus Christ. So Rahab's faith contributed to not only the safety of the spies and her immediate family, but continued the line to King David, and eventually to Jesus. God worked in the heart of this woman to produce a faith that would eventually bring His glory to the whole world.

So Rahab lets the spies out of the window. She tells them to go into the hills for three days to avoid the soldiers. And they do what she says, because they understand that this is a woman of faith. And when they return to the camp they share the news with Joshua. And their report ends with their declaration of faith, in v.23:

*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."*

So how are they so sure? They went and experienced one of the most fortified cities in the world, got pinpointed by the king and soldiers, and would have been killed if it hadn't been for the actions of a prostitute. Why would this strengthen their faith in God's promises? First, notice it is not because the people were afraid of them, as the comment about the fear of the Canaanites is added as an aside (and also). No, their assurance is in the fact that they saw God's redemptive faith in the life of someone who had no business serving God. They recognized God's hand in the life of Rahab, as it manifested itself in both her words and deeds.

Rahab is in many ways US. She is separated from God and His people, both by birth and by choice. And yet, despite all of that, she is called upon to play a crucial role in Jesus' story. Rahab is an unlikely hero, but she is no less deserving than any of us.

Rahab had a million and a half reasons not to join God on mission. So do I. And I come to God with my excuses and my justifications, and He just asks me to look Him in the face. See what He has done. Trust that He will continue to do it. And stop believing in the things that I can see, over the God who created it all. Who can make things happen that we would never see coming. Who could save a prostitute out of the enemy nation. A God who can see my sin, and still choose to save a sinner like me. You and I cannot do it, but Jesus already has. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT? Do you really?

God has promised us power. But it is a power that comes from first submitting to Him. James 4.7-8 says:

*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

And anyone who has sat down with me knows that I quote the second half of this a lot. Why? Because it is amazingly beautiful to me that the God of the universe would entrust us with His mission. That He would promise to draw near to us. That He would give us the power to repel the devil. But it all begins by recognizing where our power comes from. And not just sitting on that, but getting up off of our butts and pursuing Him.

Our faith is much more than that which saves us. Our faith gives us the foundation to view the rest of our life. It pushes us to action. It gives us the strength to keep going. It pushes us to be more conformed to the likeness of the savior. And in Rahab, we are given a picture of what faith is, and what faith can do?

And when we come forward for communion, let's remember that we are not just acknowledging what Jesus has done, but also submitting ourselves to His lordship. We are identifying with His shed body and blood, remembering that it is our sin that made His death necessary. We are committing our lives to follow His mission, wherever it sends us, recognizing that it might not be where we want to go. Let's pray.