

Spying Out the Land, Take Two

Let's turn to Joshua chapter 2 as we continuing our series *Joshua: A Journey of Faith*. In chapter one God commissioned Joshua to lead Israel into the Promised Land promising Joshua that He'd be with him and give him the land, that no one would be able to withstand him, and that he'd be successful in everything he did if he obeyed God's word. Let's pick up the story in chapter 2

2 And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." Josh. 2:1a

Joshua secretly sends two spies into Canaan to scout things out. He learned this from Moses, who some years earlier had sent 12 spies into Canaan to see what the land was like. Joshua was one of those twelve spies. If you remember the story, ten of the spies came back with a negative report saying the land is great, but the people are too powerful for us, we could never win against them. Only Joshua and Caleb came back with a positive, "we can surely take the land" report.

Faith doesn't always change our circumstances, sometimes it changes the way we see our circumstances. All twelve spies looked at the same thing, but they saw things very differently. Ten of them saw their enemies as big, themselves as small, and God not even in the picture and they say, "we can't possibly win!" Joshua and Caleb see the same land, same enemies, same Israel, but with a big God in the picture and they say, "we can't possibly lose!" Sadly, Israel listened to the ten, didn't believe God's word, and that entire generation did not enter the Promised Land. They said, "we can't enter the land" and God said, "you're right."

This is "spying out the land, take 2" but Joshua cuts out the ten negative spies and looks for two men who remind him of himself. He knows that the city of Jericho is surrounded by a nearly impenetrable wall four stories high, and Joshua wants an idea about the city's weakness. So he makes their mission clear: you're not going in to determine *if* we should take Jericho, you're going in to determine *how* we should take Jericho. Joshua has God's promises, but before he commits the army to a specific course, he wants to get some tactical insight into what that course should be. He's being tactical and practical. And full of faith.

Walking in faith usually doesn't negate the need to be practical. God may put it on our hearts to take new land, maybe you've been sensing the Lord stirring faith to take new land in your life. It could be new land of spiritual growth – loving Jesus more, getting free from some besetting sin, sharing Jesus with others. It could be new land of improving relationships with others or a major life decision. Faith that God is leading us doesn't negate the need to take practical steps to take that land. I have often found that when I feel the Lord leading in a general direction, before I commit to a specific course, it's good to scout out the land, to hover over the situation in prayer, processing, and planning. Faith doesn't negate the need for practical steps.

What's interesting is that, as we read chapter two, these spies don't really get any tactical insights at all. They don't come back with a plan on how to take Jericho, what they do come back with is confidence that God's hand is all over this thing. Let's walk through the chapter and see God's hand on them.

1. God's hand of direction

And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. Vs. 1b

At first this actually sounds like the opposite of God's direction. They enter Jericho and happen upon a house – it might have been a small inn – that happens to belong to a prostitute named Rahab. They probably didn't know when they entered, and when they found out they're probably thinking, God, what in the world are You doing letting us come here? If our enemies don't kill us, our wives will! Of all the houses in Jericho, You send us to a brothel? But God's hand is all over this seemingly random choice.

Sometimes as we walk our own journey of faith, we may find ourselves in a place that doesn't seem to be where we should be. It's one thing when we know we walked away from the Lord and find ourselves in trouble – then the answer is to repent and return to the Lord. But it's another thing when we're following the Lord the best we know how and still end up in what seems the wrong place. Lord, why am I here? Hold on with faith to God's promise that He is directing your path, even if you can't see it right now.

⁵ *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;*

⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Prov. 3:5-6*

When we put God at the center of our plans (in all our ways acknowledging God) we can trust that God is directing our path, even if it doesn't make sense to us. Don't lean on your understanding of things, trust in the Lord with all your heart. There are things we don't know and can't see. If God is at the center of our lives and plans, then His hand will direct our paths. God promises.

2. God's hand of protection

What these two spies didn't know is that they happened upon the only home in all of Jericho where they would be protected. Let's pick up in verse 2. **Read vv. 2-7**

Word got out that a couple Israelis had entered Rahab's home and the king of Jericho sent a couple assassins to kill them. These two spies would have been dead men...except the prostitute Rahab, who had grown up in Jericho all her life, whose family and friends were in Jericho, who had no attachment or firsthand knowledge of Israel, betrayed her people and hid the spies then lied to the assassins, telling them the men had been there but had left.

Scholars argue about the ethics of Rahab lying to her countrymen. I'm not going to get into that – the bottom line is that she knew she could either turn them over to be killed, or she could tell a lie to save their lives. She made the choice to save their lives. This wrong place turned out to be the one place where they would be protected. God promises to protect us. Consider Psalm 91 vv. 1-3

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

² *I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."* ³ *Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence...*

¹⁴ *"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. ¹⁵He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. ¹⁶With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."*

In the New Testament this promise of protection goes beyond our earthly well-being. God does watch over our lives to protect us, but we all know that sometimes bad things happen to Christians. Sometimes Christians die prematurely from illness or accident. The promise we have in Christ is that no matter what happens to these temporary, physical bodies, we are safe in Christ.

When an F4 tornado with 175 mph winds ripped through the town of Henryville, Indiana, Stephanie Decker wrapped her two kids with a blanket and ran down into the basement. When the house began to lift off the foundation, she looked up and saw a 20 foot steel I-beam falling toward her. She could have let go of her children and moved out of the way, but she chose to cover her children and let the beam fall on her. It crushed her legs and she now walks on two prosthetics.

On the cross Jesus allowed the full fury of God's wrath for our sin to fall on him so that he could cover us from it. Those who seek shelter under his wing will never feel God's judgment, only God's mercy. Because of that, the NT speaks of death as falling asleep. We are protected and safe, even when we die. We close our eyes here and open them in glory. And the first thing we see is Jesus welcoming us home. In Christ we are protected from eternal death and delivered safely into eternal life.

But why did Rahab do all this for them? The answer is God's hand again, this time it was...

3. God's hand of exaltation

God had exalted His name and His people in the eyes of the inhabitants of Canaan. Let's **read vv. 8-11**

This is the high point of this chapter, the hinge upon which everything else that happens in this chapter turns. Jericho worshipped the sun-god Shamash and the moon god Yerah even sacrificing their children and babies to their gods. But they had heard about Israel's God and the parting of the Red Sea and how nations were being destroyed by Israel and their hearts were melting in fear. Rahab said there was no spirit left in any man because the Lord your God is God in the heavens and on the earth.

Rahab's statement is amazing. She grew up in a pagan country, with crazy, pagan beliefs about gods. But she makes this beautiful, biblical declaration about God being the one God over heaven and earth. This kind of monotheistic statement coming from Rahab is astounding. She never learned it, but she knows it. It's like a theological version of Rory Curtis, a soccer player who suffered a brain injury and woke up from a coma speaking fluent French, even though before the injury he didn't know much French. Rahab has no biblical teaching, no theological training, yet she is speaking fluent Bible.

I hear a lot about how we live in a post-Christian era, how more and more people are turning away from the church, how weakened the church is today. And that's true. But God loves to exalt Himself through His people, so let's pray with faith that God shows Himself strong to this generation through His people.

The two spies have got to be encouraged hearing this: they haven't lifted a finger yet and the peoples of Canaan are paralyzed with fear and have no fight left in them because they know that the God of heaven and earth is with the people of Israel. God's fingerprints are all over this thing. But there's one more way God's hand is clearly seen.

4. God's hand of redemption

Let's continue reading: **vv. 12-21**

If the last section was the theological high point, this section is the high point of God's redemptive heart. The hearts of everyone in Jericho are melting with fear, but Rahab's heart is melting with something else too. She wants to know the God of Israel. While her countrymen are drawing back in fear, she is being drawn to God in faith. Honestly I think this was God's primary purpose in sending these two spies: it was to redeem the life of a prostitute. How many men over the years entered her home to use her, but God sent these men into her home to rescue her. God's redemptive hand.

- She was a prostitute, God would make her His daughter.
- She was an outcast, God would make her a respected wife and mother in Israel.
- She grew up worshiping pagan gods, God would hold her up forever as an example of biblical faith in the book of Hebrews.
- Everyone considered her life disposable, God considered her life precious. And He would weave Rahab into the lineage of the Savior of the world, for Rahab was Jesus' great, great, great, grandmother.

They told her to tie a scarlet cord on her window and they would spare her and her family. It's a picture of the scarlet cord of Christ's blood that saves us from perishing. We aren't saved by being good, or religious, we are saved when God sees the scarlet cord of Jesus' blood attached to our lives.

We were once all Rahabs – sinful, stained, polluted outcasts. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, the Rahabs of the world. This is God's greatest call on the church: to rescue lost Rahabs.

It brought back a memory I haven't thought of in many years. One year some friends and I traveled to Guatemala, and at one point we found ourselves in the red light district of Guatemala city. There's nothing here like the sad sight we saw:

Row after row of tiny shacks, one right after another, just large enough for a small bed and little else. And women stood at the doors of these shacks bidding men to come in. We began to talk to one of these young women and she invited us in to talk more. I remember thinking as the six of us plus our translator pressed into her shack, this probably doesn't look good. But in that little shack, with nothing but a bed, we shared the good news and the love of Jesus with this young woman and then prayed for her. She cried as she heard that her life was precious to God and that He sent His Son to save her.

Church, we didn't deserve God's mercy, didn't deserve His love, didn't deserve Him sending His Son to die for our sins that we might be forgiven, but God is a redeeming God. He loves people – no matter how broken they are, how stained with sin they are, how far from Him they are, He loves them. And He wants to reach them with His love through us. Let's pray, process, and plan how we together can take new land in our witness to this community. That Jesus' name would be exalted through us.

Read vv. 22-24

In the end, all the two spies have in terms of strategy is, we saw God's hand all over this thing, they're scared to death of us, we've got this! And that's enough. And knowing that God's hand in on our lives is more than enough.