



The Mothers of Jesus: Rahab

Advent Series #2

Joshua 2

Pastor David Sunday

December 4, 2011

How many of you still have the tradition of going out and getting your own Christmas tree every year? We quit that a few years ago for a number of reasons that I won't get into right now but when you pick out a tree, you're usually looking for one that is straight; one that doesn't have broken branches or big gaps in it—you want a perfect tree. Then when you take it home to decorate, you open up one of those boxes and discover that it's full of broken ornaments, you just throw them away. You don't put broken ornaments on your Christmas tree.

In these weeks throughout Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, we're looking at His family tree. It's listed in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter one. As we look at His family tree, we discover it's a crooked Christmas tree. As we especially focus on the ornaments that are on that tree—the women who are named in this genealogy, the mothers of Jesus—we see that every one of them is broken in one way or another. There's Mary the mother of Jesus who found herself unmarried and pregnant as a teenager. There's Urriah's wife, Bathsheba, whom we will look at the week before Christmas. Ruth, the Moabitess, whose story we will see next week. Tamar, whose story Pastor DeHaan told last week. And this week, for the second week of Advent, we'll learn more about Rahab.

We read in Matthew 1:1, "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" And in verses four through six, "*and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and 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.*"

Who Jesus Came From

Now why are we taking time during Advent to look at the lives of these women whom we are calling the mothers of Jesus? The reason is that I believe we can learn a lot about what Jesus came for by looking at who Jesus came from. As we consider His ancestry, we can learn more about the purpose for which He came into the world and the people He came to save.

Now Rahab—there's a reason why very few people name their daughters Rahab. In fact, I looked through our Church Community Builders (our website directory), just to make sure and I was not surprised to find there are no people named Rahab at New Covenant Bible Church. If you have a Rahab in your distant family—a niece or granddaughter—no offense but it's not a name that we typically give our children because what's the first word that comes into your mind when you hear the word Rahab? [Audience response—prostitute.] That's right—prostitute or harlot. Most of us would be ashamed to have a Rahab in our family yet Jesus is not ashamed to call Rahab “mother” and the Holy Spirit makes a point to highlight this woman, this prostitute, from Canaan, from Jericho, in the genealogy of Jesus.

So what's a woman like Rahab doing in a place like this? And what can we learn about Christmas and about our Savior's coming into the world from her story? Let's look at Rahab's story this morning in the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. Joshua means “the Lord saves.”

Joshua 2 follows Joshua 1 and the theme of Joshua 1 is the promise of God. God has promised to give to His people, the children of Abraham, the Promised Land. He has brought them out of Egypt, carried them through the wilderness and led them under Moses. Now under the leadership of Joshua, they are poised to take possession of the Promised Land. So God says to Joshua, “Believe in the promise. Be strong and courageous for surely I'm going to give you all the land that I've promised.”

We could have easily skipped in the narrative from Joshua 1 about God's promise to give His people the land, straight to Joshua 3 that begins, “*Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan...*” to take possession of the land. In terms of the narrative, we could go from chapter one to chapter three without skipping a beat but God wants to teach us something about His heart—His heart for lost people. He wants to teach us something about His mercy so He pauses the narrative in chapter two and introduces a woman whom most scholars say is the second most

important figure in the book of Joshua. This harlot—this Canaanite prostitute—named Rahab. What can we learn from her story this morning?

Let's start with Joshua 2:1: *"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."* Now our attention should be rising in our minds and hearts as we read this verse.

First of all, Shittim was not a happy place in the memory of Israel. It was not a proud place for them to look back on. The last time this place, Shittim, was mentioned is in Number 25. It's the place where the Israelites were seduced by Moabite women and they went after their gods. So it's a place of both moral and spiritual immorality.

The second problem in this verse is Jericho. Jericho was a notoriously wicked city just on the other side of the Jordan River where you would have found a whole lot of paganism and a whole lot of sexual type worship in the temples and sex symbols all over the place, as well as sex trade. And where do these spies go? To the house of a prostitute. What are these guys doing there? Are they no better than James Bond sent on a reconnaissance mission? The first thing they do is go into the house of a prostitute.

Now, I think we need to give these men the benefit of the doubt as there is no indication in the text of Scripture that they had any immoral intentions going into this house. It's likely that they chose this place because it would not have been uncommon for men to be going in and out of that house so they would not have stood out like sore thumbs. Also, it was probably a place where information flowed freely so if you're looking for reconnaissance data, if you need information about the land, a prostitute's house would be one place where you could find that information. Nevertheless, these men are in a place of grave danger, a place of physical risk, in the house of a prostitute who lived, in the words of one author, "out at the edge of all of life." She lived on the edge of the law; she lived on the edge of love; and Rahab lived on the edge of hope. Let us not think that her life was glamorous in any respect. It was a miserable life. We know not how she ended up in this line of work but she was stuck in an occupation that was degrading, disgraceful and full of personal shame and trauma.

In verses two and three, we see that the men are almost instantly in trouble:

"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 Rahab, being the woman that she was, probably had a number of informants in town and when they saw these men heading toward her house, somehow she found out they were on their way and she had just enough time (verse four says) to take the two men and hide them. It's clear in verse six that she took them to the upper part of her house, the most secret place, and hid them there. In verse four through seven, we read about Rahab's lie—maybe we should call it her lies.

- Lie number one—verse four: *“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.’”*
- Lie number two—verse five: *“And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out.”*
- Lie number three: *“I do not know where the men went.”*
- Lie number four: *“Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.”* She sends these guys on a wild goose chase.

Verse six: *“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.”* And amazingly in verse seven, these men believe Rahab. They don't search any further. It says, *“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.”* Now these spies are trapped. They are in Jericho; the gates of the city are shut. They are incredibly vulnerable and at the protection and mercy of this woman—Rahab the prostitute. What's going to happen to these men? Well, the writer won't tell us until verse 15—don't look ahead because he wants to keep you in suspense. What's going to happen to these men?

The first question that should be on our minds is, “Why did Rahab do this? Why is she putting herself at such great risk?” She was now aiding and abetting the enemy who wanted to come in and destroy her people and her culture. She was lying to the king's officials and aligning herself now, not with the people of Jericho, but with the people of Israel. Why would she do such a thing? Why would she put herself at such great risk? If those Secret Service men would have said, “We want to search your house...” they would have found those men. Or if they would have come back and looked some more, Rahab would have been summarily taken to the king's court to face his imminent wrath—probably

execution of a most vicious sort. She was committing treason against her nation. Why would she take such a risk?

Was it because these Israelite men were really good looking and she had some kind of attraction to them? Was it because she was really a nice lady at heart? Rahab the harlot? You know, "I just felt sorry for these poor guys who were in such trouble and felt that I just had to do something to help them."

No, she tells us why she took this risk. It's not a sentimental reason. It's not a physical attraction reason. It's a theological reason. Verses eight through 13 are the longest recorded speech about God from a woman in all of Biblical narrative. It's the heart of Joshua 2. Now naturally, when we read verses one through seven, questions about ethics come to our minds. If we read this story to our children and she's lying through her teeth, we're tempted to say, "Now children, don't do as Rahab did. Don't be a liar." Of course, God no more approves of Rahab's deceit than He approves of her prostitution but that's not the point of this story.

We can spend a lot of time talking about the ethics of what Rahab did and miss the greater point. The point of this narrative is not Rahab's lie; the point is Rahab's truth. The truth that she confesses about God in verses 8-13 is the reason why she has put her own life at risk and done the things she has done.

Verse eight: "*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...'*" Now imagine the astonishment on these men's faces as this woman—this harlot, this pagan prostitute—came and started encouraging their hearts with the promises of God. If there was anyone who was unlikely to be a proclaimer of the gospel, a preacher of God's promises, it was Rahab. But here she is, speaking truth to the men of Israel about their God. Perhaps she, at this moment, believed the truth even more than they did. They were in there doing reconnaissance and she was telling them, "All you need to know is this: God is going to keep His promise. "*I know that the Lord has given you the land...*" Something else in verse nine. "*...The fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.*"

The thing that Moses prophesied in Exodus 15 when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, when he said, "*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (15:11)...The peoples have heard; they tremble... (15:14)...all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away*" (15:15).

Remember Moses saying that after the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea? Here, Rahab is saying that word of God is proving true. “The peoples have heard what your God does on behalf of those who trust Him. The people have heard how God destroys the enemies, how He curses those who curse you and blesses those who bless you. They are trembling in fear because they know you are camped right outside the Jordan.”

Rahab was saying, “I know that God is on the move. I know that God’s Kingdom is advancing and I don’t want to be in the way.” That’s the reason why she broke from a culture and a people and religion and even an occupation that was completely antithetical to the God of Israel and said, “I’m going to align myself with these two men; with these spies.”

Now how did Rahab know this? How did she know that the Lord had given them the land? How did she even know about the promises to Abraham? Well, verse ten tells us how she knew. She didn’t get a vision in the night. She didn’t arrive at this idea through her own rational wisdom. She heard. She heard the Word of God. She heard of the deeds of God. She heard an announcement, a communication about God’s mighty redemptive works on behalf of His people. In an Old Testament sense, we could say she heard the gospel. She heard the good news of what God had done.

Verse ten: *“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 when she heard of God’s mighty redemptive acts on behalf of His people who trust in Him, she responded in the way that anyone should first respond when they hear the gospel. She trembled. Her people were terrified.

Verse 11: *“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.”* She said the same thing Moses said in his dying words in Deuteronomy 33:26-29,

*“There is none like God, O Jeshurun,
who rides through the heavens to your help,
through the skies in his majesty.
The eternal God is your dwelling place,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.
And he thrust out the enemy before you
and said, Destroy....
Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you,
a people saved by the LORD,*

*the shield of your help,
and the sword of your triumph!
Your enemies shall come fawning to you,
and you shall tread upon their backs."*

She believed that. She announced that to these men. She spoke of her faith and her confidence in what God was doing in the world and she trembled along with her people because she realized they were a people who had stood in opposition to this God. She acknowledge, "We are a people who have rebelled against this God and if God is on the move and His Kingdom is advancing and we are in rebellion against Him, we are going to face great judgment. We better get out of the way."

Who Jesus Came For

When God's Kingdom is on the move, those who rebel against Him find no refuge from Him. Rahab understood this. It was a terrifying thing to her so she wanted to align herself to this One true, living God. Her transformation took her from a pagan prostitute to being an Israelite woman who became the mother of Boaz, who was one of the ancestors of King David and ultimately of Jesus.

Her transformation happened the way any spiritual transformation occurs in anyone's life. You hear communication from God. You hear about God's mighty acts to save those who trust in Him. And then you are convicted of your sins and your need of God's grace in your life. Conviction results in a trembling, in a fear of God. The news of what God was doing put the fear of God in the heart of this pagan prostitute but she didn't stop that conviction. She didn't stop the trembling; she forsook her idols and she fled to this God and to His mercy.

Verses 12 and 13: "*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.*" What was Rahab doing here? She was making a clean break from her idolatrous culture, doomed to destruction from the religion and world view of Jericho and she was casting all her hope—for now and for the future—on the covenant faithfulness and mercy of the One true God of Israel. She was fleeing to God for mercy.

One true sign of real faith is that you aren't just concerned about your own salvation. You're concerned about the salvation of those who are dear to you as well. And Rahab wanted her family to also be delivered from God's judgment.

The men agreed to her request in verse 14: *"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.'"*

And finally in verse 15, we're relieved of the suspense. How are these men going to escape you've been wondering, right? How are they going to get out of this tight spot? People are looking all over the place for them. The Secret Service is filtering out through Jericho—how are they going to get out?

I remember when I was in junior high, I had one of those little cards with that cliché on it: "When God closes one door, He opens a window." That's what happened here. In verse 15 we find out for the first time where Rahab's house was located—it was on the city wall. Wouldn't you know there was a window there? She let them down the wall and I don't know if it was while they are rappelling down the wall or if they had this conversation prior to it but we're getting a little flash back in verses 16 through 21 where we learn of this final conversation the spies had with Rahab:

"...she said to them, 'Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.' The men said to her, 'We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.'"

Rahab needed to put her faith into action. *"Faith without works is dead."* It's not enough to just say, "I know God is mighty to save. I know that I am justly under the judgment of God. I depend on God for His mercy." To just say those things is not enough; you have to actually put yourself under His mercy. You have to demonstrate through your actions that what you say you believe is true.

In Rahab's case, that meant continuing on in Jericho, waiting for the people of Israel to arrive, continuing to live in a culture that was totally opposed to the God that she now

believed in, and remaining faithful in trusting this God, even though the culture around her was forsaking this God. And the way she was to demonstrate her faithfulness was to tie this scarlet cord outside her window—setting herself apart, marking herself out as one who has fled to the God of Israel for refuge.

Now I'm sure you've heard interpretations that suggest that this scarlet cord is an allegorical symbol of the blood of Christ. It was red and Jesus' blood is red. I don't think that's the best interpretation of this text. It was a scarlet cord that set Rahab apart but what that cord did for Rahab is the same thing that the cross of Jesus and the blood of Jesus do for us who flee to God for refuge from His just judgment against our sins. And if we are to find refuge from God's judgment, we must find it in only one place—the cross. Running to Jesus...

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.

(Rock of Ages, Augustine Toplady & Thomas Hastings)

Rahab demonstrated her faith was true by obeying the word of the spies. Verse 21: *"And she said, 'According to your words, so be it.' Then she sent them away, and they departed."* The idea we get in this last sentence is that she took care of this immediately: *"And she tied the scarlet cord in the window."* She found refuge in the mercy of the God of Israel and the promise declared by the servants of the living God. She trusted that God would be her Protector from His wrath when it fell on her city.

Verse 22 says, *"They departed and went into the hills and remained there three days until the pursuers returned [the pursuers gave up on the chase] and the pursuers searched all along the way and found nothing."* So then the two spies could go back to General Joshua.

Look at verse 23: *"Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they told him all that had happened to them."* Now what happened to them? This wasn't your typical reconnaissance mission. They really didn't have a whole lot to report.

I can imagine Joshua asking the men, "Where are the most important hideouts of the enemy?"

“Well, General, we really don’t know; we never got that far. We were just in this prostitute’s house.”

“Tell me,” Joshua asked, “where are the weak spots? Where should we attack first?”

“Well, we actually never got around to asking that question. We don’t know.”

“How many people do they have in their army?”

“Sorry, General, didn’t find that out either. All we have to tell you is this...”

Verse 24: “*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.’*” In other words, “All we have to give you, General, is the promise of God. The gospel of God. What God said to Abraham, He will perform. He has given the land into our hands and those who would curse us would be cursed. They are already trembling in fear. That’s all we have to say, General. The gospel; that’s all we have to go on. That’s all that really matters. That’s all we need to know. It’s the key to all our victory. It’s the source of all our confidence. The God who has promised to deliver us and to provide for us is indeed going to keep His word.”

And who did they hear that from? A pagan prostitute who was at that point no longer a pagan and soon won’t be a prostitute either. She’s going to end up living the rest of her days in the land with Israel; marrying a man who was from a princely family—Salmon. She’s going to be like a princess in Israel. She’s going to have a son named Boaz and next week, we’re going to see that he’s the only honorable Israelite in Bethlehem who is willing to take a widow named Ruth under his wing and care for her and protect her. Where did he learn such compassion if not from his former harlot of a mother? From these people will come King David and from him will come the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Messiah of God’s people. This is Rahab’s destiny.

Who is the true hero, humanly speaking, of this story? Not the Israelites spies but a pagan woman—a vocational adulteress who welcomed men into her home and into her bed and into her body for profit. She lied; she worshiped idols and yet, by the grace of God, she believed in the God of Israel. She confessed that His promises were true.

But behind the human personality stands a greater hero. A God whose mercy is so great that...

“The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.”

(To God Be the Glory, Fanny Crosby)

Is it any wonder that Jesus is not ashamed to call a woman like Rahab one of His mothers? In fact, later in Matthew 1:21, the angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, “*You shall call His name Jesus*”—Yeshuah, Joshua, the Lord saves—“*for He will save His people from their sins.*” Jesus is not ashamed of our disgrace; Jesus came to rid us of our disgrace. Don’t ever say, “My sins are too great for Jesus to save me.” Just look at His family tree!

Think about who Jesus appeared to first in the Gospel of John and disclosed Himself to as the Messiah. It was the Samaritan woman at the well who had had five husbands and the one she was living with then was not even her husband.

Think about the story of the woman caught in adultery and Jesus stopped the people who were about to stone her. We’re told that He bent down and wrote something in the sand. I wonder what He wrote there. Someone suggested that He was writing, “How would you feel if she was your sister?” Maybe Jesus was thinking about His great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, Rahab, at that time.

And who was the first person to whom the risen Christ appeared in the Gospel of John? A woman—Mary of Magdalene who had been possessed and oppressed by demons and who was a notoriously immoral woman.

He came to save His people from their sins. And when He saves His people from their sins, their sins no longer matter.

Rahab is mentioned three times in the New Testament. First in Matthew 1 as the mother of Jesus. Secondly in James 2, right up there along with Abraham, the father of the faithful, as a woman who demonstrated her faith by her works. And in Hebrews 11 she is commended for her faith and she is rid of her disgrace.

Friends, Jesus came to take the scarlet “A” away. To remove your shame. To rid you of your disgrace. He is a God who delivers His people from their sins and He is able and ready and willing to welcome any sinner, from any nation, out of any condition, who puts their faith and hope in Him.

Joshua 2 gives us the picture of the marvelous character of our God. He is a dreadful Judge to those who oppose Him but He is a delightful Savior to those who flee to Him for mercy. He is the hope of the world. That’s what we’re singing about this Christmas.

Two Christmas lessons that we can draw from this story:

First, if you’ve never trembled, you do not treasure the gift of God’s Son. Rahab’s first response was the same that is needed from everyone who encounters God—tremble,

fall on your knees before Him. Often we get a sentimentalized view of Christmas: chestnuts roasting on the open fire; faces all aglow. Who doesn't want hot chocolate and berries and mistletoe? It's wonderful! But if we let sentimentalism totally envelope our view of Christmas, we forget how earth shattering God's judgment is.

There's a reason why the shepherds out in the field, watching over "their flocks by night," were afraid when it was announced to them that the King had come. When they saw the multitude of the heavenly hosts—heaven's army encamped outside Bethlehem—they realized the King was on the move. He was invading this fallen planet and they trembled.

If you haven't trembled before Jesus, you haven't treasured Him. He comes to bring peace to those who trust in Him but He's coming again to bring judgment to those who rebel. And when He comes again, for those who rebel against Him there will be no refuge. So tremble before the Savior. Flee to Him for refuge.

The second lesson confronts our moralistic view of Christmas. Until you stand in Rahab's place, you cannot taste the Savior's grace. I said this morning that there are no Rahabs at New Covenant Bible Church. The truth is there are a lot of Rahabs here. We're no different than she was. Were I to stand before the Judge of the universe with Rahab at my side and were I to proclaim to the Judge that somehow I am more deserving, more worthy, more faithful of His favor than she is, I would find that I am destined for God's judgment. I would find that I whither.

There's a reason why Jesus said to the Pharisees that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom before they would because they thought they were the insiders. They thought they were the ones who really belonged to the family of God. But God was saying, "Until you stand in Rahab's place—until you see yourself as guilty, vile and helpless, full of disgrace, you will never taste the grace of the Savior who came to rid you of that disgrace."

We hear at Christmas that someone is "making a list and checking it twice; going to find out who is naughty or nice." Then Santa Clause will reward those who have been good. But the real message of Christmas is that none of us is good. We're all naughty. None of us is nice. None of us deserves the gift of God but He is the God who welcomes Rahabs into His family.

Do we at New Covenant welcome people like that into our family? Do we at New Covenant have a list? Are we checking it twice? Who is naughty? Who is nice? Who fits in with us? Who will we welcome into our club? The minute we make anyone feel like an

outsider, the minute we make anyone feel like we are better than they are, we are then alienating ourselves from our Savior's family. He welcomes Rahabs into His family. The more we see Rahab's character, the more we see ourselves.

There's an English writer whose moral character was shameful and perverse. He once wrote these words: "There is hardly anyone whose sexual life, if it were broadcast, would not fill the world at large with surprise and horror." Maybe he wrote those words to assuage his own conscience but the truth is, I would not want to stand beside Rahab and say, "God, I deserve more than she does. I want to take her place. I want to stand in her shoes."

No, I need to acknowledge, "I'm guilty, vile and helpless. Jesus, thank You for welcoming me into Your family. Jesus, thank You! You call Rahab mother, but you call me Your Bride. Worthy are You, Lord."

Let's pray. Lord, here we stand: undeserving, unworthy, desperately in need of Your mercy. As Rahab stood outside Jericho on the night of judgment and saw the smoke rise, heard the cries and screams of people who were falling under Your wrath, I'm sure she wondered, "How can it be that I've been spared the judgment I deserve." Lord, how much we owe You for rescuing us, by Your grace, from the judgment we deserved. So Lord, we pray for a broken-hearted humility to characterize our lives. We stand in amazement at Your grace. We pray for any Rahab in our church today who is full of shame and disgrace. Together we flee afresh to You, our wonderful Savior who cleanses our consciences and releases us from our guilt and sets us free and makes us part of Your family. We worship You, Lord Christ, for coming into the world to save sinners like us. Amen.

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