11-3-24

Joshua 2:1-24

The account of Rahab in the Bible is well known; and it should be. Rahab is a model of how we ought to act having the knowledge of Yahweh; and more importantly, it tells us of the great mercy and kindness of God almighty. It tells us that God is concerned about each of us as individuals. And that should be a great comfort to us.

Perhaps the first thing to deal with is that Rahab was a prostitute. There are a number of commentators that will try to water this down by translating the word as “innkeeper”. It is inconceivable to them that the Lord would use someone so vile as a prostitute to advance His Kingdom. But this is unnecessary. The Bible is full of cases where the Lord uses vile people. Furthermore, Christianity shows that the Lord will use unsavory people who turn to Him.

Keep in mind what Jesus told the religious leaders in Matthew 21:31, “*Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.*” All of us are sinners; and none of us will see the Kingdom of God unless we believe on Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Before Jesus was born of the virgin, salvation was through faith in the God of the Hebrews. Rahab has demonstrated that saving faith, so what she had done in the past was forgiven.

Now having said that, it is also probable that Rahab ran a boarding house or inn of some kind with prostitution being just one of the services offered. The city of Jericho was on a major east-west passage, so many travelers came through the area. And this also explains how Rahab knew so much about the people of Israel. She would have gotten lots of world news from those who were traveling through.

She heard about the great nation of people who were wondering through the desert after a miraculous escape from Egypt. It might also have occurred to her that there was no way for millions of people to be sustained in the wilderness without divine intervention. She certainly knew about the conquest that had very recently taken place just a few miles away across the Jorden River. Two powerful groups of Amorites led by their kings, Sihon and Og, had been obliterated by Israel. She had heard that their mighty God was Yahweh; and she believed.

Remember what Jesus said to the apostle Thomas after His resurrection: “*Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.*” (John 20:29) Rahab was no fool. She heard the evidence and believed it and chose to throw herself on God’s mercy. Of course, the Holy Spirit worked in her heart to open these things up to her; but she accepted it. And when she saw her chance, she took it.

Think about Joshua sending the spies in the first place. Why did he do that? They hadn’t even crossed the Jorden River yet. Once they did cross the river they built a memorial, set up camp, had all the men circumcised and waited to heal, and also celebrated the Passover. There was plenty of time to have sent spies then. And as it came to pass, God told Joshua how to wage the battle of Jericho so there was never any need of spies. Plus we see in verse 1 that Joshua sent the two in secretly. No doubt the disastrous results of Moses sending the twelve spies into the Promised Land almost forty years ago was still vivid in his mind. He was taking a chance by sending them that they might bring back a bad report.

I am certain that what we have here is a demonstration of God’s great mercy and power. God was bringing the whole nation of Israel across the Jorden River into the Promised Land. He was fulfilling a promise He had made centuries ago. He was bringing judgement upon the peoples of Canaan due to their remorseless evil and idolatry. Yet in the midst of all this, God knew that there was one woman in that land who believed and would follow Him. You can bet that God was behind Joshua’s decision to send the spies and even behind which two men went.

It might seem odd to us that the two Israelites just walked into the city. But remember that Jericho was on a major road. Travelers of all different nationalities would have passed through constantly. And it would have been normal for any who were staying to seek a place to lodge. By the way, there is no indication of any immoral behaviour between the spies and Rahab. They would have simply been using her boarding house as a base of operations.

But satan is always on the look-out for ways to interfere with God’s people. So, there was a man there who saw the two men and recognized them as Israelites; and he knew what Israel’s God was planning to do. He went and told the king of Jericho who also knew what the Israelites were up to. The king immediately dispatched guards to Rahab’s house to capture the Israelites.

Again, we learn that Rahab is an intelligent and resourceful woman. She knew the spies would be recognized and caught, so she took them to the roof of her house and hid them under flax. Flax is a tall plant that would be harvested and then laid out in the sun to dry. Its fibers can then be spun to make linin. It was a good place to hide them.

When questioned, Rahab told the guards that the men had been to her establishment but had very recently left. She then encouraged them to quickly pursue them. They believed her and took off along the seven miles of road between them and the Jorden River. Which brings us to a part of the story that has caused some Christians problems over the years: she lied. Was it okay for her to lie? The Bible is pretty clear that lying is a sinful endeavor. Do we need to worry about this?

No. She was saving the lives of innocent men. Jesus was clear that when human lives are on the line, the rules take a second place. He sited David and his men eating the consecrated bread because they needed food. Even working on the Sabbath to save an animal or minor effort when hungry was allowed. And even more basic, we must remember that we are saved by grace through faith. We don’t deserve salvation, but if we believe, God will save us.

I must add that this is not a blank check to sin. Sin is very serious and is the cause of all the horror we see in the world today. We must never presume on grace. We depend on it, but we must not presume on it. And we are all too good at justifying ourselves and excusing our faults and failings; we must be very careful with this. I think the main thing is that life, especially human life, is very precious to God and that has to play a big part in our decisions.

Now comes a very interesting negotiation between two parties who are in very precarious positions for negotiating. Rahab wants a guarantee of safety for her and her family. All she has to do is yell and the spies will be caught and executed. Of course, if she does, she will be annihilated along with the rest of the people of the city. The spies want to return to Joshua without being exposed. But in order to do so they have to make a deal with this Canaanite woman and covenants with the Canaanites were expressly forbidden in the Law. (Deut 7:2) Again, the saving of human life comes into play.

An agreement was made with very reasonable expectations: Rahab would keep silent regarding the spies and their arrangement. She had to keep silent because if word spread, they might find scarlet strings hanging from all the windows in Jericho. Also, all her family had to be in her house. Israel couldn’t be responsible for them if they were scattered throughout the city. In return, the two men pledged their own lives if anything happened to Rahab or her family.

We see another example of the Lord’s mercy. In accordance with faith, Rahab was the righteous one; not her family. Yet ultimately the Lord saved the lives of them all on account of Rahab. We don’t know if any of her family turned to the Lord once they lived with Israel, but they had a much better chance than the rest of the population of Jericho.

There is a similarity here with the city of Sodom. The city was condemned to destruction due to its blatant sin. The Lord brought Lot out of the city because in spite of his failings, 2 Peter 2:7-8 tell us that he was a righteous man. And because of him, his family was given a chance. His sons-in-law chose to remain in the city and faced destruction. His wife turned back to the city after she escaped because that is where her heart remained. She was turned to a pillar of salt. His two daughters still had a chance but it doesn’t look good for them. God loves to give us a chance, but we have to take it. And from this we can see that the children of Christian parents have a better chance due to the righteousness of their mom and dad.

It's not until Joshua chapter 6 when we find out that everybody held up their end of the bargain. Rahab’s family were all brought out of Jericho and the Bible specifically tells us that she lived in the midst of Israel. So Rahab became a follower of the God of the Bible. Interestingly, she does not show up again in the Bible until the New Testament.

In the book of Hebrews, chapter 11 teaches about some who are often called the heroes of the faith. Along with the likes of Abraham and Moses, Rahab is listed. Verse 31 says: *By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.* Rahab believed what she learned about God and bet everything on it. She placed her life in His hands. She believed that if she clung to Him through His people, her life would be saved. If she would have been caught harboring the spies, she would have been executed. She trusted in God.

In the same way, we must put all our eggs in one basket. Cling to Jesus as the only way to salvation. Accept all the risks that come with being His follower. He is trustworthy. As Rahab lived in a sinful place that was destined for God’s judgement, among a people who knew the impending doom and still would not repent; we live in a culture that is opposed to God. Do like Rahab did and stand counter to our culture.

Another lesson comes from her which is found in James 2:25, “*In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?*” Rahab was not passive in her faith; she was active and worked according to it. She risked her own life to help the two men of Israel. She took them to a hiding place and covered them up. She negotiated on behalf of herself and her family. She misled their pursuers and advised them on how to escape back to their people. This was the evidence of her faith because none of it would have made any sense if she didn’t truly believe.

Now it is natural to wonder what happened in her life once she lived among the people of Israel. We’ll have to find out the details once we meet her in heaven. But we do find out a little once we come to the Gospel according to Matthew in chapter 1.

Rahab met and married a man named Salmon and they had a child named Boaz. Boaz married a woman from the land of Moab who was named Ruth. In three more generations king David was born and, of course, from that line came Jesus. The woman who saved the lives of the two men of Israel, became the ancestress of the One who would save the world.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for preserving these accounts in Your word. It somehow seems a shame that she is still labeled by the sin that she was known for. But it does show us that You are able to use us regardless of our condition; and that You are a forgiving God who lavishes us with grace. It is also good to know that Rahab has been washed clean by the blood of Jesus, and none of the guilt now clings to her. She is pure and one day she will see resurrection and there will no longer be stain or remembrance of her sin.

Lord Jesus, we know that this is a promise for each of us that live in You. How blessed we are that one day we will be washed completely clean and there will be no hint of the filth that now clings to our feet. Thank You that even now we are clean and have been covered in Your righteousness; still, may Your Holy Spirit call us to daily repentance so that we might stay in close fellowship with You.

While we acknowledge that works do not bring us righteousness or salvation, please incline our hearts to good works; whereby we know that our faith is true faith, that it is saving faith. You have prepared works for us to do, open our eyes to see them so that we don’t miss the opportunity to be Your faithful servants. We are Yours, Lord Jesus, by Your mighty work on the cross.

We praise You in Your precious name

Amen