

Lent 2010  
Biblical Courage in a Frightening World!  
Rahab the Harlot  
Courage is overcoming who you are when you know the truth.  
Pastor Tom Parrish

Joshua 2:1-16

“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient” (Hebrews 11:31).

There are certain occupations that we associate with certain biblical characters. To say a particular name immediately brings a certain occupation to mind.

- David was a shepherd.
- Nehemiah was a cupbearer.
- Isaiah was a prophet.
- Peter was a fisherman.
- Herod was a king.
- Esther was a queen.
- Matthew was a tax collector.
- Caiaphas was a high priest.
- Paul was a tentmaker.
- Lydia was a seller of purple cloth.

Perhaps the strangest of all is Rahab. Mention her name and immediately one occupation and only one comes to mind.

Rahab was a harlot.

She traded sex for money in what has sometimes been called the world’s oldest occupation.

The Bible makes no bones about Rahab’s occupation and makes no attempt to cover it up.

The first time we meet her in Joshua 2:1, she is called “a prostitute named Rahab.”

She is called “Rahab the prostitute” in Joshua 6:17 and again in 6:25.

If that isn’t enough, twice in the New Testament her occupation is mentioned:

**“By faith the prostitute Rahab” (Hebrews 11:31).**

**“Rahab the prostitute” (James 2:25).**

That’s five times in all when one would be enough.

It seems that the Lord wants us to think “prostitute” when we think about Rahab.

I wonder if we have lost the sense of how degrading a profession this is?

Hollywood has managed to glamorize prostitution so that it doesn’t seem very ugly. Sex in general has become so casual that we aren’t very surprised by anything anymore.

Although many think nothing of it, sexual sin always leaves a deep scar on the soul.

No person can cheapen themselves through sexual sin and escape the deep sense of guilt and shame that comes along with it.

Those who say they feel no guilt are simply lying to themselves.

**HERE IS THE POINT: The Bible makes no bones about Rahab’s occupation and makes no attempt to cover it up.**

I imagine Rahab had given up any hope of ever turning her life around.

But the Yahweh of Israel (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) had other ideas. He can turn shame into glory in one shining moment of redemption.

Therefore as strange as it may seem the Bible mentions Rahab the harlot as a hero of the faith.

She made the Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11. Think of that list . . . Abel . . . Enoch . . . Noah . . . Abraham . . . Sarah . . .

Isaac . . . Jacob . . . Joseph . . . Moses . . .

And then suddenly . . . Rahab!

And if you go to the end of the next verse, you find David, Samuel, and the prophets.

That means Rahab the harlot is in some pretty good company.

Note the past tense. She “was” a harlot. That’s what she was. But through the grace of Yahweh she became a woman of faith.

### **I. A Hopeless Beginning**

When Philip Edgecumbe Hughes wrote his commentary on Hebrews, he noted the barriers facing Rahab.

First, she was a woman in a world in which women were often mistreated, devalued and taken for granted.

How remarkable, then, that the writer of Hebrews should choose two women and only two to highlight-Sarah the wife of Abraham and Rahab the harlot.

By including a woman like this the writer wants us to know that the ground is level at the foot of the cross, and that even in that degraded age a woman could be included on an equal basis with men in the household of faith.

Women of Hope. You are of equal value to the men and Jesus desires to work through you, no matter your past, to change the lives of others.

### **Second, she was a harlot.**

The fact that she was a harlot magnifies the grace of Yahweh by demonstrating that even the lowest of the low could find a place in Yahweh’s family.

Grace is for sinners, and only sinners need to be saved.

So Rahab stands as a beacon of hope to the broken, hurting, bruised, fallen men and women everywhere who look in the mirror and feel, “There is no hope for me.”

If you feel that way, then consider that Rahab was a harlot and at this very moment she is in heaven. If Yahweh can save her, he can certainly save you.

Third, she was a Gentile, a foreigner, raised in a pagan religion.

As such, she did not belong to the Israelites, and yet by faith she was accepted by Yahweh and by his people and when the great attack on Jericho came, she was spared while the city around her was destroyed.

Her life illustrates Yahweh’s promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) that through his descendants all the nations on earth would be blessed.

If Jesus can heal and utilize Rahab, giving her courage to overcome her shame and guilt, he can certainly do the same for you!

- Too many of us who have been in the church all our lives sometimes fail to recognize the great debt we have been forgiven.
- Too often we take the grace of Jesus for granted when in fact we should be throwing ourselves at his feet for mercy.
- Some of us here tonight have a hidden past like Rahab. We have done things in the past that are devastating.
- Some of us have believed the lie that whispers: Yahweh will never forgive you for what you’ve done?
- Inside we hear: You’re tarnished and worthless.
- Jesus’ was nailed to the cross for you, your sins, your mistakes, your shame and guilt.

•There is nothing his shed blood does not cover.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Does his blood cover adultery? YES
- Does his blood cover your teenage sexual mistakes? YES
- Does his blood cover your shame? YES
- Does his blood cover your guilt? YES
- Is there anything in all creation that his blood does not cover for those who come to him in repentance and faith? NO!

It was hard for Rahab to believe as well, and we can imagine many reasons she might not have believed.

Certainly she took a great risk when she sheltered the spies and sent them out another way and when she refused to tell her own people where the two spies were and sent the soldiers on a wild goose chase on the road that leads down to the Jordan River.

Why would she do it?

There are two ways to answer the question, and they both lead to the same conclusion.

Joshua 2:9-13 tells us that she and all the people of Jericho had heard stories about how Yahweh had delivered his people through the Red Sea and how he had given them victory over the Amorite kings.

That fact means that everyone in Jericho had some degree of knowledge.

Rumors had spread like wildfire.

But only Rahab had the foresight to believe that the Lord himself was at work in all that had happened to the Jews.

Where does such foresight come from?

I believe the eyes of her heart had been opened by the Holy Spirit so that she took the same information others had and came to a proper conclusion.

Throughout our lives Jesus gives us spiritual insight, the power to respond, the power to believe.

Some believe, repent and trust in Jesus just like Rahab.

Others hear, see and refuse, or ignore, or choose another path for their lives.

Therefore on the day of judgment it can be rightly said, “**Rom.1:20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.**

When it came time to choose sides, Rahab chose to side with Yahweh’s people.

She even went so far as to make provision for her own family.

**Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death (Joshua 2:12-13).**

Here is another sign of true conversion. She now has a concern for the safety of her extended family. She doesn’t want to be saved alone. She wants to make sure her family is saved with her.

## II. A Remarkable Deliverance

The spies agreed to spare her family in the coming attack on Jericho if she tied a scarlet cord to her window.

Why a scarlet cord?

In the chaos of the coming battle, a scarlet cord would be easily seen by the attacking army.

But there is a deeper symbolism at work here.

The scarlet cord reminds us of the blood of the Passover.

The color was no coincidence.

It was a scarlet cord that guaranteed her deliverance from otherwise	certain death.
Note that as soon as the spies left, Rahab tied the scarlet cord in the	window so everyone could see it.
She had no idea when the attack would come.	
Maybe in a few days, maybe in several weeks. It didn’t matter.	
She believed the promise and acted upon it.	

Here is the key. Rahab heard the promise and did something about it.

What would have happened if Rahab had forgotten about it and never gotten around to tying that scarlet cord outside her window?

She would have died like everyone else.

It is never enough merely to hear the truth, we have to do the truth.

Hearing the truth must move you to action sooner or later.

Rahab the harlot, this sinful woman who sold her body for money, made the Hall of Fame of Faith for one reason.

When the chips were down, she believed the promise and did something about it.

And that simple scarlet cord saved her life.

Let each person who hears these words take them solemnly to heart.

You may be a religious person.

You may be very moral in the eyes of others.

You are probably not a harlot.

You would likely be embarrassed to be classified as a harlot.

And yet you may not end up as well off as Rahab.

You may hear the gospel over and over and yet do nothing about it.

You may believe that the blood of Christ can forgive your sins, you may even be a member of the church, but until by faith you come to Jesus Christ personally, you are destined for death.

Rahab heard the word and personally responded by tying the scarlet cord to her window.

You and I must do the same thing. It is not hearing that saves us, but hearing and believing to the point that you reach out and trust Jesus as Savior.

Days passed. Then a week and perhaps two weeks. Inside Jericho life proceeded as normal. Meanwhile two things were happening that few people knew about.

1) Rahab spreads the word to her relatives. "When the attack starts, come to my house. Don't delay. Don't join the battle. Don't run and hide. Come to my house and you will be safe." Rahab became an evangelist to her own family.

2) Joshua led the children of Israel across the Jordan and up toward Jericho. The men of Jericho to close the city gates in the belief that they could withstand any assault and any siege.

We all know what happens next.

The Lord instructed Joshua and the people to march around the city for six consecutive days.

On the seventh day they marched around the city seven times.

The Lord promised that on the seventh day, on the seventh time around the city, when the priests blew their horns and the people shouted, the walls would come tumbling down.

That's exactly what happened.

With the walls down, the people of Jericho were defenseless.

We all know that part of the story. Here's the P.S. With the walls down, the people of Jericho were defenseless.

The Jews attacked destroyed Jericho.....

Except . . . except for Rahab and her family.

The scarlet cord in her window spared her and everyone with her.

And so Rahab the harlot was spared and her faith caused her to reach out and guarantee the salvation of her own family as well.

This is true conversion.

### III. A Timeless Message

For 2000 years Christian expositors have seen two major themes in Rahab's story.

#### 1) **Salvation is even for the worst of sinners.**

This story teaches us that no one is beyond the reach of Jesus' grace. Even in the midst of judgment, Jesus reaches out and saves a harlot who turns to him in faith.

But think of all the sinful things she had done. Think of her stained reputation. Think of her past.

And Jesus says, "I know all about her past, and it doesn't matter because she believed in me."

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:  
though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

So what's your sin? You may be listening this sermon and right now you feel unworthy to come into the presence of Jesus.

You may be saying in your heart, "If these people at this church knew what I have done they wouldn't want me here?" I have wonderful news for you.

Only unworthy people go to heaven.

The people who think they are "worthy" end up in hell.

Your unworthiness makes you an excellent candidate for salvation.

Rahab knew she was unworthy but she had the courage to trust the God of Israel. That courage made her faith real when she chose to hid the spies and seek their protection for her and her family.

Do you have the courage of Rahab?

Remember . . . If Jesus can save Rahab, he can save anyone. And that includes you.

And just for the record, I would rather be Rahab the harlot on my way to heaven than to be Sally the Sunday School teacher on my way to hell.

## **2) Salvation through the blood of Jesus.**

If Rahab represents a helpless sinner, then the scarlet cord represents the blood of Jesus shed for you.

There is no sin so terrible that Jesus cannot forgive it.

There is no stain on your soul that Jesus cannot wash away.

I am often asked this question: Pastor **“I how much faith do I have to have to be saved?”**

This question has been argued for centuries. Unfortunately **it is the wrong question!**

### **REMEMBER THE WORD OF GOD: Faith is a gift of JESUS.**

It’s not the amount of faith that matters. It’s the object of faith—Jesus Christ!

Rahab knew enough to know that the GOD of the Israelites was the one true GOD.

Her faith, which produce actionable courage, aused her to welcome the spies and then send them on their way.

And her faith caused her to hang the scarlet cord out of her window.

In theological terms, she was in spiritual kindergarten. But it didn’t matter.

Remember: It’s not the amount of faith that matters. It’s the object of faith-Jesus Christ

### **One final Word.**

What happened to Rahab after the fall of Jericho?

We know this much. She married a Jewish man named Salmon and together they had a son named Boaz whose name pops up in the book of Ruth.

Boaz and Ruth gave birth to Obed the father of Jesse the father of David who became the king of Israel.

Get the picture?

Hundreds of years later her name shows up on the first page of the New Testament. When Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus, he includes this section:

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

and Jesse the father of King David (Matthew 1:5-6)

Rahab the harlot made the list. She’s part of Jesus’ family tree.

If you know Jesus, one day you will meet her in heaven.

Here is the million dollar question we all have to answer:

**No matter how sinful we have been,  
No matter how many mistakes we have made,  
No matter how dirty we feel,  
No matter how little trust we have....**

Do we have the courage right at this moment to turn to Jesus and ask him for the courage to receive his forgiveness, to lay down our sins, to trust in his promises, and to become his life-long disciple?

### **Response to Sermon:**

\_\_\_\_ This week I will confess my deepest darkest sin to Jesus and at least one other Christian whom I trust.

\_\_\_\_ This week I will ask Jesus to use me, despite my sin and shortcomings, to help others discover that they too can be forgiven.

\_\_\_\_ Tonight, when I go home, I will take five minutes to give thanks and praise to Jesus Christ that he came looking for me in my sin and healed me.

**PRAYER**