

Joshua 2:8-21

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Before the men lay down, [Rahab] came up to them on the roof⁹ 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."¹⁰ 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."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."¹² 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 sign¹³ 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."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."¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall."¹⁶ And 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."¹⁷ The men said to her, "We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear."¹⁸ 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."¹⁹ 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."²⁰ But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear."²¹ And she said, "According to your words, so be it." Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

The people of Israel were on the verge of finally stepping into the Promised Land. They had been on the doorstep before, about 40 years before this, when God ordered Moses to send twelve spies into the land to investigate before entering. Of course, of the twelve, ten of those spies were terrified by the strength of the people living there and delivered a report that they would not be able to survive, that they were like grasshoppers before the inhabitants of the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, assured the people that they had nothing to fear, saying, **"If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.'"** (Numbers 14:8)

The people of Israel heard the reports and decided they should stone Joshua and Caleb, elect a new leader, and return to Egypt. Even after all the LORD had done for them since they day they walked out of Egypt, they still did not trust that He would follow through on His promises. So, God sent Israel to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, until that faithless generation had passed away and a new generation would rise up who would listen to the LORD. Well, here they were, a new generation that was much more faithful than their parents, now being led by that faithful spy Joshua, and they're ready to enter and take the land which the Lord had promised them.

Before they do, Joshua sends spies into the land once more, particularly to pay close attention to the city of Jericho. Jericho was a very prominent city, a heavily fortified city that was strategically located to

control the important migration routes between north and south, east and west. Thinking of it in our own terms, if a foreign power were to try to take over the United States, they might start with New York City, the financial center of our nation. That was sort of what Jericho was to Canaan. If you could overthrow Jericho, you could conquer the whole land.

And so, in the verses leading up to our text, the spies enter the city walls and lodge at the house of a woman named Rahab. Rahab was a harlot, a prostitute. Unfortunately, that meant her house was the type of location that lots of out-of-towners would stop at, and so—in the minds of the Jewish spies—the perfect spot for them to lay low without drawing attention. Then things go sideways. The king of Jericho hears about the Jewish visitors, knows where they are, and he sends a search party to Rahab’s house to arrest the spies. So, Rahab takes the spies up to the roof of the building, a flat roof where it was common to do such work as drying flax and other grains. She hides the spies under piles of flax, and after sending away the search party, goes up to them, and they have the conversation of our text.

They strike a deal. ***“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.’ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall.”*** How unlikely is it that Rahab would have mercy on these spies, enemies of her people? How unlikely is it that she would jeopardize her own life simply to defend the lives of these men practicing espionage? How unlikely is it that these men would keep their word, going to all the work to ensure that when they ransacked Jericho, that every soldier knew that the house that had a red chord hanging from the window was to be untouched? How unlikely is it that they, God’s chosen people, would strive to save this Gentile, and a harlot at that?

I guess, we *could* figure that Rahab having mercy on these men was really just an effort to save her own skin. After all, she’d heard all about these men and what they were capable of. She says, ***“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.”*** So, perhaps this *was* just a deal struck in the interest of self-preservation. But there’s really a lot more going on here than just self-interest.

You see, long before the spies had entered Jericho, before the Israelites had even arrived at the edge of the Promised Land, the Word of God had reached the ears of the people of Jericho. And yes, they’d all heard about what the LORD had been doing, so that, as Rahab describes, ***“Fear of you has fallen upon us, and . . . all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.”*** But knowing the great power the LORD had displayed, Rahab wasn’t overcome with terror. She recognized these mighty works as signs of the God who acts for His people, signs of the God who keeps His promises. She confesses, ***“The LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.”*** And it is *faith* that leads her to strike this deal with the spies. Faith, not in these men keeping their word, but in *God* keeping *His* Word. That’s why she says to them, ***“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.”*** She calls upon the name of the LORD as the assurance that she would be spared. She believes the LORD is the God who stays true to His Word.

And we know that it is true faith that led her to this moment, because she is included in the Hall of Faith chapter of Hebrews, where it is written about her: **“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”** (Hebrews 11:31) She did all of this *by faith*. Which seems then to make this whole event seem all the more unlikely! After all, what are the odds that of all the places in Jericho, these men would end up staying with the one woman in the city who had come to faith in Jehovah God? What are the odds?! It reminds me of the book of Ruth, when Ruth seemingly stumbles across the field of Boaz, the kinsman redeemer who would become her husband. **“She set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.”** (Ruth 2:3) She *happened* upon the field, almost as if it was a coincidence! What are the odds?!

Of course, we know that with the LORD, there is *no* such thing as coincidence. It wasn't random chance, but *God's* doing that brought His Word to Rahab, that planted faith in her heart, that led the spies to her door, that spared their lives and likewise spared Rahab. Because Rahab and her family *did* survive the day that Jericho's walls came tumbling down. And Rahab the Gentile, Rahab the Harlot was welcomed into Israel. She would go on to meet and marry a Hebrew man named Salmon. Together, they had a son named Boaz, who would later meet Ruth in a field and marry her. Together, Ruth and Boaz had Obed, and Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David, the great king of Israel. (cf. Matthew 1:5-6) And to *David* was given the promise of a descendant after him whose throne would be established forever. (cf. 2 Samuel 7:13) That descendant would be Jesus, David's Son yet David's Lord.

And that *means*, of course, that Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, was a direct ancestor to Jesus, God's Only-Begotten Son. And so, the question we should be asking is *not*, “What are the chances of that,” but rather, “Why would God direct all these events so that *this* is the *result*?” After all, consider who Rahab is! Breaking the Sixth Commandment is her way of making a living; she is a serial adulterer! If we were to come up with a list of the most morally reprehensible jobs in the world, that list could include such things as hitmen, drug dealers, adult film stars, abortion clinic doctors. All of those jobs would fit the billing, in *our* minds. But right up alongside them would be what Rahab was! If we ran into Rahab, we wouldn't give her the time of day, much less show her the type of mercy that *God* showed her!

But herein lies the difference between us and God: while *we* are quick to condemn, quick to dismiss someone as irredeemable, regularly considering *certain* people as lost causes, **“The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”** (Psalm 145:8) *And yes*, the LORD is a God of justice, as Moses describes Him: **“A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He.”** (Deuteronomy 32:4) As a just God, He had every right to destroy Rahab's soul in hell. The fact that He did *not* do so is not because He doesn't care if people break His commandments. Rather, it's because He's also the God of mercy and grace. In His mercy, God did not demand that justice be enforced against *Rahab*. In His grace, God gave her what she did not deserve, to be welcomed into His family and become an ancestor of Jesus. And it was from Jesus, *instead*, that God demanded justice.

“He was pierced for [Rahab's] transgressions; he was crushed for [Rahab's] iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought [Rahab] peace, and with his wounds [Rahab was] healed.” (Isaiah 53:5) What Rahab *was*, then, is not of as much consequence as what she became. She became a child of God and an heir of promise. She was **“no longer [a stranger] and [alien], but . . . [a fellow citizen] with the**

saints and [a member] of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19) All of this happened for Rahab simply because God sought her out with His Word and directed all of these events so that Rahab could be saved. Which, of course, could lead to the question, "Why Rahab?" And God gives us a simple answer, ***"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*** (Romans 9:15)

And it wasn't just a prostitute that was the only horrible sinner to whom God showed mercy. No, again and again throughout Scripture, we see God showing love and mercy to horrible, miserable sinners. Moses was a murderer. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband murdered in order to cover it up. Paul persecuted Christians. And yet when you look at those individuals, God not only forgave them, not only are they in heaven, but God greatly used them throughout their lives so that they are some of the most prominent men in all of Scripture!

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible; he led the Israelites out of Egypt before handing the reigns off to Joshua. David is known as "great" King David; he wrote many of the Psalms and is the most prominent ancestor of Christ. Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles, called by Christ Himself. He went on missionary journeys, wrote thirteen letters of the New Testament. Like Rahab the prostitute, none of them deserved God's grace and mercy, yet that is exactly what they received.

And you can add your name to that list of horrible sinners to whom God has shown great grace and mercy. You're no different than Rahab! After all, God frequently uses the illustration of harlotry to describe the faithlessness of His people. And we have been faithless; receiving so much grace from God and yet treasuring so many other things as our most priceless possessions. We're like the children of Israel, in that God has given us promises, but we daily doubt them. But He has also given us a further promise: ***"If we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself."*** (2 Timothy 2:13) Even though our hearts might condemn ourselves as irredeemable, God is not quick to dismiss you. God does not consider you a lost cause. Though we are harlots like Rahab in our hearts, God has opened His heart to welcome us into His family.

He bought you back from your sins on the cross, pouring out the blood of His heart in love for you. He sought you and found you, working all the events of human history together so that you could be brought to the waters of baptism, so that you could become heirs of the promise together with Rahab. Yes, God has mercy on whom He will have mercy and has compassion on whom He will have compassion, and (thanks be to God!) He has shown that same mercy to you.

The story of Rahab seems to be, on the surface, the most unlikely of stories. But when we peel back the layers, all we see is the hand of a loving God guiding events to save lost sinners. And just as He's done for Rahab, He's also done for you. Mercy for Rahab, mercy for you. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.