



I don't know if you've noticed but fall is in the air. I love Fall. Fall means kids in the crosswalks on the way to school, changes of color, college football and holidays like Thanksgiving. But I'll bet you didn't know there's another holiday in the fall that comes a few weeks before Thanksgiving. It's a holiday Christians have celebrated for centuries. It's called All Saints Day. This year it's on November 1. It is kind of the church's version of Halloween. Different churches celebrate slightly different things on All Saints Day, but it's always been about faithful believers—those on earth and those in heaven.

Funny thing about saints—some saints are easy to spot; others not so much. Men like Paul and Peter; Augustine and Luther. Women like Mary and Mother Teresa. These are saints. We all get that.

Last week we were introduced to Joshua, and I think we'd all agree Joshua is a saint.

- He's mentioned not less than 27 times in first five books of the OT.
- When we first meet him in Exodus he's a mighty warrior fighting Israel's enemies under Moses' direction.
- Then in Exodus 24 he's chosen to ascend the mountain of God with Moses as his "assistant."
- And when Moses sent spies into Canaan, only Joshua and Caleb came back believing God's promises.
- It's no wonder the Lord chose Joshua to lead Israel into the Promised Land. If there was ever a saint, Joshua was among them!

But today we come to Joshua, chapter 2 and all our preconceived notions of sainthood are shattered. Here the focus isn't on Joshua but on a Canaanite woman named Rahab. In fact, she's rarely referred to as just Rahab. In Joshua 2:1 she's introduced as a *"prostitute named Rahab."* In chapter 6 Joshua commands two spies to *"go into the prostitute's house and bring her out..."* Even in the NT she's always referred to the same way—*"Rahab the prostitute."* It's like she can't seem to shake it. And let's face it, it's a dubious title, especially for a saint. I know what you're thinking, "Mark, we've got children present here. Why can't you talk about Noah or Abraham or Sarah or Moses?" But I'm here to tell you today that Rahab is a saint.

How can a woman like this possibly be called a saint? The Bible gives us a very clear answer to that. It is found in her story in Joshua 2. It's a wild story that has it all: danger, spies, sex, suspense, deception and a great chase scene. If this were a major motion picture it could break all the box office record.

Joshua Sends Two Spies into the Land

The story starts this way.

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there (v. 1).

Joshua faces a dilemma. The people of Israel are based in an area called Shittim (sorry about that; now I'm in trouble again!). As Joshua contemplates entering the Promised Land, he's aware of two huge obstacles. First they'd have to cross the Jordan River in flood season; no easy task! But then they'd immediately be confronted by the Canaanite city of Jericho. It was a well defended, walled city, blocking Israel's entrance into the land. Israel's position would be quite vulnerable once they crossed the Jordan—an enemy in front of them and a river in full flood behind them. So Joshua does a smart thing. He secretly sends two men to spy out Jericho. Just because God promised victory doesn't mean he shouldn't use his brain.

They come to Jericho and enter the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Bible scholars like to debate over why they went there of all places. You know: two men, away from home, on the road. But there's nothing here suggesting they were there for immoral purposes. Most likely this house served as an inn or way station. Such a place would naturally draw the vices of the area, but it would be a place where these spies could sort of blend in and perhaps learn something about the area. But make no mistake, Rahab was what it says she was—a prostitute. But these men received something different from her than you might think.

Rahab Hides and Protects the Spies

Rahab will give them two things. The first thing is protection. And they needed it. It seems these two guys weren't very good at staying undercover because it didn't take long for word to get out they were spies.

The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." So the king of Jericho sent this message to

Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut (verses 2-7).

Do you feel the intensity of this scene? We should be on the edge of our seat! The king of Jericho finds out some Israelites have come to spy out the land. He discovers they stayed at Rahab's house. He orders her to bring them out. You don't mess around with the king! She's in great danger. Any misstep on Rahab's part will mean curtains for her.

But Rahab had taken the spies up on her roof and hidden them beneath some stalks of flax. The roof was likely the floor of the upper story of her house where guests would often sleep. But of course she doesn't tell the king's men that. No, she says, "Yes, they came to my house. But they're no longer here. They left at dusk before the city gate was closed and if you go after them now you can catch up with them before they cross the Jordan."

This is what we call a lie. Some people say this means it's okay to lie when necessary. If it means saving a life, go ahead and lie. But we shouldn't forget God could have saved these two men without her lies, but she didn't know that. The point of the writer isn't whether it was right or wrong to lie, but rather that she risked her life to protect these two Israelites.

There's another important detail not to miss. Verse 7 says as soon as the pursuers had gone out the city gate was shut. Back then, gates were shut to a city for protection, to keep enemies out. But those gates also shut people in, including the spies! So these guys are in a heap of trouble! How are they going to get out? How will they get back to their people? That's the anxious question we're left with at the end of v. 7. And we're left hanging because we don't get the answer until v. 15.

Meanwhile, the scene shifts and we're taken up to the roof of the house where Rahab speaks in whispered tones to the spies. The way the writer has laid this out it is like he's saying to us, "Don't worry about how the spies will escape; there's something way more important I want you to hear..."

Rahab Makes a Startling Confession of Faith

Listen carefully to Rahab's words.

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, "I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

"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."

"Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land" (verses 8-14).

Here's the second thing Rahab gave to these spies: encouragement and confidence God would do as he had promised. As they're lying there on the roof of her house covered in flax she's giving them a clear picture that God has gone before them and prepared the way.

Several years ago, after Lynn and I graduated from Cal Poly, we felt the Lord leading us to enter a two-year internship at PBC in Palo Alto called Scribe School. It was a scary move for us because we had no money, no job, and no where to live. But out of the blue two things happened. First, my father had an opening in a small apartment building he owned in Los Altos, and he wanted us to live there and manage the building for him. Then my old football coach from high school, who I hadn't talked to in five years, called me out of the blue and offered me a job on his coaching staff. It was one of those times where all of a sudden it was very clear that God had gone before us and prepared the way.

As the Israelites look in the direction of the Jordan River, they're overwhelmed and afraid. But through Rahab's testimony they can see the Lord has gone before them. He's working in the lives of their enemies; he's preparing the way before they even lift a sword. Jericho is already defeated in spirit. It's like how Serbia must have felt before they played the U.S. men's basketball team for the gold medal. Their hearts melted in fear, and sure enough they lost by 30 points! It's the same thing here. Before Israel's toes even touch the Jordan, the hearts of the people of Jericho melt in fear.

It's interesting that over 40 years earlier, after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they sang a song to the Lord. It was like a prophesy of what was to come when they entered the Promised Land. Listen

to the words, *"The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall on them"* (Ex. 15:14-15). And here, that's exactly what comes to pass! You can imagine how this encouraged these spies to trust God. Notice what they say to Rahab in v. 14, *"If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land."* Not **if** the Lord gives us the land, but **when** the Lord gives us the land. They got that confidence from Rahab!

Let's take a moment to see this from Rahab's perspective. I asked the question a few minutes ago: How can a woman like Rahab the prostitute possibly be a saint? Let me give you a one-word answer: **Faith**. Here's a woman who has everything stacked against her. She has no family background to inform her of the living God. She lives as a pagan in a thoroughly wicked city. She makes her living in a way that's an offense to God. Her city is about to be judged and destroyed. Yet, this woman and her family will be saved and become a part of the family of God. In fact, she'll eventually marry a man and they'll have a son named Boaz. Boaz will marry a Moabite woman named Ruth and they'll have a son named Obed who'll have a son named Jesse, and Jesse will have a son named David, the King of Israel.

How does this happen? Faith! Her faith may be that of a beginner; she's just taking baby steps, but it's enough to save her and make her a child of God. What does Rahab the prostitute teach us about faith? First of all, she heard about and believed in the living God. She says in v. 10, *"We have heard..."* She goes on to describe how they heard God had acted in history on behalf of the Israelites. She calls him "the LORD," Yahweh; not the Canaanite name for God, but the personal name God had given the Hebrews. They heard of how he dried up the waters of the Red Sea and defeated the two kings of the Amorites. She says in v. 11, *"When we heard of it our hearts melted in fear..."* So she's not alone in this. The whole city had heard and melted in fear. But to our knowledge only Rahab took it a step further and concluded this: "the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." That's faith. Faith is looking at what God has done in history and concluding he's the true and living God. Biblical faith is based on knowledge of historical events. It isn't just a warm and cozy feeling about God. Faith grows out of hearing what God has done for his people. We talk about "falling in love." Even couples who fall in love don't do so without talking, doing stuff together, getting to know each other. Even romance has some basis in knowledge. So it is with faith. Paul wrote in Romans, *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Rom. 10:17).

But that's not all. Her faith is also seen in how she sought the mercy of God. She asked the spies to "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 (family)..." You see, real faith isn't content with just believing in the reality of God, but it presses forward to take refuge in God. Remember, God is going to judge these people. He's the Judge of all the earth. You know that, right? But here we see he's given the people of Jericho some knowledge of himself. That's why their hearts melted in fear. And now this woman, Rahab the prostitute, has come to believe there might be a way out for her and her family. Faith isn't just believing in the true and living God. Faith is pressing on to pursue his mercy and grace, trusting he'll provide a way of escape. And he will, because he's more than just a judge, he's a Savior. Others in Jericho could have done the same thing with the knowledge they had, but as far as we know Rahab was the only one who pressed closer.

Throughout the OT there's a beautiful picture of the mercy and grace of God for those who take refuge under his wings. Boaz says Ruth has come to the God of Israel, *"under whose wings you have come to take refuge"* (Ruth 2:12). The psalmist prays, *"How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings"* (Psalm 36:7). Faith is taking refuge under his strong and tender wings of mercy.

And that leads to this last evidence of faith. This is where this scarlet cord comes in. This plays an important part in what happens next. In fact without the scarlet cord we'd never know about Rahab today. Listen to what happens next.

So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. She said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

Now the men had said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

"Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say."

So she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window (verses 15-21).

Here we finally learn how the spies could escape given the fact the gates were shut. Rahab's house was built on the city wall. For a long time biblical critics claimed this story was made up because there was no evidence of houses built into city walls in the ancient near east. But excavations in Jericho later proved the city was surrounded by double walls with twelve feet between

them, and houses built between the two walls! I've seen houses like this. One side of my family is from a small city in Italy called Lucca, which is known for its walls. These aren't just ordinary walls; they're so thick you can drive a car on them! And there are homes built on the wall just like we see here. So these spies are let down the wall by a rope through the window of Rahab's house. She even offers them instructions in intelligence work, telling them where to hide and when to go home.

But then they have some instructions for her. "You must tie this scarlet cord to this window. All your family must be inside the house. If they aren't in the house, we're not responsible for what happens to them." She agrees and she wastes no time. That very moment she ties the cord to the window.

It's hard not to imagine these spies were thinking back to the night of the Passover. Remember the story? God is about to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. The angel of death will pass through Egypt and all the firstborn males will be killed. But God says if you wipe the blood of a lamb across your doorframe your house will be passed over. We don't really know if that's what these spies are thinking when they make the scarlet cord the sign for Rahab's house to be spared, but it seems likely. Throughout the history of the church this scarlet cord has been taken as a sign of not just the blood of the Passover lamb but of Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

At the very least for Rahab that scarlet cord was a symbol of redemption. Can't you just imagine Rahab rushing out and gathering all her family inside the house on the wall? "Hurry! Get in here! See that scarlet cord? Trust me. It will all make sense later!" I love how she cared about her family. She could have just gone with the spies. But she cared too much for the safety of her father and mother, brothers and sisters. Noah did the same thing with his own family, gathering them in the safety of the ark before the floods came. We should all work as hard to gather our own family into the safety of God's household.

One thing the Bible is very clear about is true faith is demonstrated by our actions. Faith never stands by itself; it always expresses itself in good works. That's why Rahab is found among the saints in Hebrews 11:31, "***By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.***" And that's why James uses her as a prime example: "***In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead***" (James 2:25-26). Rahab's faith is seen in her willingness to put her own life at risk

in hiding the spies. She makes a bold choice to trust this God whom the spies represent. In so doing, she changes her whole future as well as her family's.

The Spies Return and Report

The story ends when the spies leave, following her instructions precisely. When they return to camp, the sum total of the intelligence report they deliver to Joshua after three days in the land is this: "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us." Remember how God encouraged Joshua in chapter one to be strong and courageous? Now God is encouraging Joshua through a Canaanite prostitute's words — all the people are melting in fear because of us.

It's quite a story; a saint's story:

- Rahab the prostitute—an example to all saints who'd come after her.
- Rahab the prostitute—part of the genealogy of not just King David but of Jesus Christ.
- Rahab the prostitute—in the Hall of Fame of faith. A faith that heard and believed in the living God. A faith that pressed further to take refuge under the shadow of his wings. A faith demonstrated in concrete acts of obedience. Make no mistake, that's a saint! It's faith that can make a prostitute a saint.

It seems God loves to turn things upside-down. He chooses the most unexpected people and makes them into saints. Years later, do you remember who Jesus met in this same city of Jericho? A sinful tax collector named Zacchaeus. He'd heard about Jesus too. But he had a problem. He was so short he couldn't see over the crowd to see Jesus. But he was so eager to see him he climbed a sycamore tree just to get a glimpse. Jesus looked up and saw him and said, "Come on down, I want to stay at your house tonight." Zacchaeus was so excited he jumped down and told the Lord he'll give half his savings to the poor and pay back anyone he cheated four times the amount. After Jesus saw the evidence of his faith, he said this man is a true son of Abraham; a child of God. Why? "Because the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

If you feel keenly your own sinfulness more than your saintliness, remember Jericho. Remember Rahab, the prostitute. Remember Zacchaeus, the tax collector. They both responded in faith and became like diamonds set against the darkness of their city. God loves to take unlikely people and make them people of faith. We call them saints.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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