

Guest Preacher - Donald M Mackinnon (Elder North Tolsta)

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Preacher: Mr Donald M Mackinnon

[0 : 00] Can we turn again then for a time this morning to the second passage of Scripture we read Joshua chapter 2.!

And she, that is Rahab, 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 last time we were together, we were looking at this passage, and I should have said at the end of the service that it was my intention, knowing then that I was going to be here today, that it was my intention to come back to this and continue studying Rahab, and particularly the scarlet cord. In Scripture, there is a very, very, very interesting aspect of Scripture to be observed, what some people call bookends.

You know what a bookend is. You have a library. One end, you might have quite a heavy weight at both ends, and the books in between, and the bookends are there. And throughout Scripture, we have bookends.

[1 : 40] And you may never have thought of that aspect of Scripture. And yet, once you do begin to observe it, you begin to see it time and time and time again.

So perhaps to illustrate what I'm talking about, let's take the life of Christ as an illustration of bookends.

You know that Christ was born to his mother Mary, and his father was Joseph. Not his biological father, but his father, Joseph.

And he played a vital, vital part in the life of Christ at the very beginning of his life. We read in Scriptures about the times of the dreams that he had, the dreams that he had to take Christ away, to spare Christ's life.

And so, at the beginning of Christ's life, we have this very, very important man, Joseph. And then right at the end of Christ's life, we have that very, very dramatic intervention of another Joseph.

[2 : 50] So there's a Joseph at the beginning, bookending it, and there's a Joseph at the end, bookending it. Joseph of Arimathea. I often, in my mind, think what the disciples and those who were around the cross must have thought, what was going to happen when Christ breathed his last and said, it is finished.

What is going to happen now? And then, as you know, this very, very important man, Joseph, comes in, and he's used by God to go request the body of Christ from Pilate.

And along with his friend Nicodemus, they go. They draw the nails out of the body of Christ. They take it down, and they take it to the tomb, to Joseph's own sepulcher.

And he's there. So there's a Joseph at the beginning, and there's a Joseph at the end. It's bookended the life of Christ. And that follows so many times through Scripture.

Even in the passage we've read here, there are two particular bookends. Rahab talks about a bookend. Two great things had made such a deep, deep impression upon her as used by the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 13] And we'll come on to that in a minute. The two things, something that began at the beginning of the wilderness journey, something that happened at the end. Bookends. The Red Sea.

Right at the very beginning of the wilderness journey, she had heard the news of the Red Sea.

Right at the very end of the wilderness journey, the defeat of Sihon and Og.

And there's bookends. But of course, the one we're going to look at today is the Scarlet Chord. And the Scarlet Chord itself is a bookend.

Because when we think of the Scarlet Chord, and we just, in our minds, step back for a moment and think, so here is a house, here is deliverance, here is a mark on a house, a Scarlet Chord. We cannot but recall what that reminds us of. How the children of Israel had come out of Egypt and what had been the mark of their deliverance.

[5 : 23] Surely it had been the blood, the scarlet blood on the Dorpus and the Lintels. As they came out, and now they're coming in.

And here's this whole thing repeated over again. Bookends. The Scarlet Blood and the Scarlet Chord. Both of them applied to dwelling places.

We've just sung Psalm 90. How interesting is it the way Psalm 90 begins? Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in generations all.

And how interesting is that when we think of the scarlet blood on the Dorpus and the Lintels. And now the Scarlet Chord on the window of Rahab's house.

And so it's difficult, and I found difficulty with this. I was thinking, well, we sort of looked at Rahab the last time I was here, and I found it difficult to think, how am I going to look at the Scarlet Chord without going back over Rahab's faith?

[6 : 40] And you cannot. We simply cannot. I know we touched on it the last time. And so I want to think of Rahab's faith in this way, and share with you that when I started following, I had a question, but I was almost reluctant to ask it, because I thought, well, it might be a silly question to ask.

And the question was this. How were people in the Old Testament saved? How was Rahab saved? This incident that we're reading here, as I look it up online, I see that this is believed to be something between 1400 and 1500 years before Christ.

So how was she saved? And perhaps to help us understand that, we need to ask the question, the wider question, how is anybody saved?

And that's the reason we read Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2 is one of the great, great chapters in Scripture that bring before us the translation, the transition that happens when a soul is brought from darkness to life, from deadness to life.

And you all know how Ephesians chapter 2 begins with these great, great, great, great words. You were dead in trespasses and sins.

[8 : 17] And the death that is spoken of there, of course, is the spiritual death that came into the experience of mankind, that came into the experience of Adam. We've spoken about this here many times before I know.

So that Genesis 2, 17, In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. And when Adam disobeyed, through disobedience, death came into his experience and our experience.

Spiritual death, physical death, eternal death. And the first one that he experienced was spiritual death. And so, how are we saved? We are all born, as we sang in Psalm 51, conceived in sin. We come into this world spiritually dead. Now, let me just quickly say that's not excluding the potential that there can be regeneration in the womb.

That is another one. But let's just take the general view that we are conceived in sin and we come into this world as spiritually dead. And that is how each and every one of us, and that is where saving faith finds us.

[9 : 29] That's where we experience the great words of Ephesians 2, that change that's introduced there to us, that but God moment.

You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, where in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works, and the children of disobedience, among whom we all lived and were by nature, the children of wrath, even as others.

And then there's that, but God. But God. And what does that refer to? It refers to that work of regeneration, that work of effectual calling, where the Holy Spirit takes what has been appointed by God, what has been accomplished by Christ, and applies it to our lives.

And in doing that, we are given knowledge, the elements of faith. I can never get away from talking about it. We are given knowledge. Our understanding is enlightened.

The truth about ourselves. We are brought to see that we are guilty, that we are sinners. By nature, by practice, by choice.

[10 : 53] We sin in thought, word, and deed. Our motives are sinful. And we are brought to see that as ourselves, and the truth about ourselves, and that we cannot save ourselves.

We are given that knowledge. But we are also given the knowledge of our salvation. That there is a name given out among men in the heaven whereby we must be saved.

And with that knowledge that we are given, whether it be through the hearing of the word, the reading of the word, faith comes by hearing. And this is the fascinating thing about Rahab.

When we think of how little she had, the scant, scant resources that she had that enabled her to believe it, but also to trust it.

And so Rahab was saved in exactly the same way as you and I are saved.

[11 : 58] Her faith was a faith that was looking forward. Ours is a faith that is looking back the way. And that is how Old Testament believers were saved.

They were saved in exactly the same way as you and I were saved. There was that work of the Spirit, and there was that work of the Spirit in the life of Rahab.

And Jesus himself in his earthly ministry spoke about mustard seed faith. We might ask the question, how much knowledge does somebody need to have to come to faith?

And yet, when we look at Rahab, as I've said, and you cannot get away from this when you read this, when you hear her testimony, what had been blessed to her, we have it there in verse 10, we have heard, and you could almost say, I have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you came out of Egypt.

Now, interestingly there, you have to then factor in this thought, if she knew about the Red Sea, surely she knew about the blood that was on the doorposts and the lintels of the houses in Israel that were the means, the sign of their salvation, the sign of them coming out of Egypt.

[13 : 35] And all that communicated to her understanding. We have heard of the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt.

And this knowledge that the Holy Spirit, in bringing her to a saving knowledge, has enlightened her with, listen to her, the Lord, your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

A remarkable, remarkable statement coming out of such scant resources. We live in a day today where the resources have never, ever, ever been so abundant as they are today.

And yet, here is this remarkable faith, this mustard seed faith. One commentator, one Bible expositor says, the tiniest bit of mustard seed faith, when it is through faith from God, can grow to an immense proportion in the life of a believer.

An immense proportion. And I want to introduce at this point something that I read some time ago and it really, really, really stayed with me.

[15 : 07] And I can say it's something that is a prompt in my life. If not every day, it sits there all the time. One of the Puritans who, as we're thinking of faith, as we're thinking of Rahab, as we're thinking of how this faith outworked in our own life, one of the Puritans said this about faith.

Faith is the root and obedience is the flower. Take that with you today. In our lives, faith is the root and obedience is the flower.

And let that be something that is active each day in our lives. Am I flowering in my faith by being obedient?

and when we are disobedient, come and confess it and ask to be restored and renewed so that your life has all the beauty of a flower.

But at this point, I want to bring that in because when we look at this faith, this remarkable faith, surely this is what is so attractive and so beautiful to behold, the obedience of this faith.

[16 : 42] And it is a truly remarkable faith. Why? Because she is a person in a city that is about to be destroyed.

They had the same opportunity, capacity, message, knowledge that she had. And yet it made no impact whatsoever upon Jericho.

Why? Why did that happen? Why is it that they all knew it? And she says that. She says, we've heard everybody in here.

They're terrified. They know. But why does that happen? Well, I would commend you to be reading often 2 Corinthians chapter 4 because I think in the verses between verses 3 to 6, we have a great, great teaching for us that we need to understand, we need to grasp, but we need to take and to pray over.

What are these words? Let me read them to you. 2 Corinthians and we're thinking of everything that Jericho had. Here was Rahab, she had the knowledge, it was taken to her saving.

[18 : 20] why did Jericho not turn to God? 2 Corinthians chapter 4 If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

Why? In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God should shine unto them.

that's why blinded. Why are there thousands and thousands and thousands of people in this spiritually blessed island of ours today who are able to have access to the knowledge that has been savingly blessed to so many people here and throughout our island and today they will completely reject it.

We live in a day sadly when sport is more worshipped in our island today than God and I don't have to tell you that today is one of them but that's a tragedy because the God of this world has blinded their minds and it's such a solemn solemn passage to read in Corinthians but then the solemnity changes completely as we read of what happened to Rahab if they didn't then what happened to Rahab and Paul says this to us for God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness brings before us that astonishing creative moment when God simply spoke into the darkness of this world and said let there be light

Paul says God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and notice what he says there he talks about God commanding the light to shine into the darkness but into our hearts it says God himself hath shone the uncreated light the uncreated light that has shone into our hearts has shone into the heart of each and every one of you who today are in Christ and so as we think of Rahab as we think of Jericho we cannot detach ourselves as we are thinking of the scarlet cord we cannot detach ourselves from that wider picture that great solemn picture of faith Rahab Jericho and everything that went on there and is ongoing to this very day and so to come to the scarlet cord in the window itself and I come back to my saying if faith is the flower obedience is the root obedience is the flower so what was the scarlet cord well the scarlet cord is exactly in Jericho what the blood on the doorposts and the lintels of the houses in Egypt was a sign pointing forward depicting deliverance redemption and salvation just as the angel of the

[22 : 15] Lord passed over the homes in Egypt who were obedient who were obedient to the Lord's command just as the angel of the Lord passed over the homes in Egypt who were obedient to the Lord's command and so delivered them from the final plague in Egypt the death of the firstborn son so Joshua and the Israelites showed mercy to Rahab's family and passed over her house while destroying Jericho because of her faithfulness to them and to God her faithfulness to them and to God and I think one of the most solemn passages solemn verses you have in scripture as you think of this and you focus in on

Rahab and the scarlet cord in the window and that astonishing unfolding of providence where the children of Israel thirteen times encircled Jericho and then with a shout and the walls came crashing down and the inhabitants were destroyed and yet standing there is this pillar this pillar this monument of God's mercy and in Hebrews chapter 11 that great cloud of witnesses of faith we simply read this about Rahab by faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not by faith she perished not with them that believed not who of us can understand what it must have been for

Rahab from the time the spies went away and how many times her eye fell on that window looking at that scarlet cord and the exercise it was to her faith and yet I cannot help but think that she must have known about how others had been delivered from death by the scarlet blood and now the scarlet cord and that unfolds and it takes place and she is delivered and we know that from there she went on to have a wonderful life because we know and there's no mention of it here she was married and we know she was married and because her son is Boaz who married Ruth both of whose names we have in the

Matthew 1 account of the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ Rahab and Ruth but I want to think of a greater deliverance that Rahab experienced as we come to conclude because long before she ever tied the scarlet cord in the window Grace had tied a scarlet cord in her heart and she went on to face a far far greater experience than what she faced in Jericho and which you and I must also face the last enemy the last enemy and so my question to you is what is your own hope today what is your own hope today do you have that assurance do you have that experience that we read of in Ephesians chapter 2 that quickening work of

God's spirit whereby you know that that work of salvation has taken place in your own heart or are you here today and you witness so so much in the day in which we are found how many times as even this day itself I understand has the voice of death spoken in your hearing reminding each and every one of us that we must pass this way not there is only one name under heaven given out among men whereby we must be saved we must have that scarlet cord of saving grace that application of the blood of

[27 : 47] Christ being applied to ourselves I've told you the story many times of what Douglas Macmillan experienced when he was preaching in point at an ordain back how overwhelmed he was as he thought about the people of this island who rejected the gospel and friends we don't know we don't know when we are going to experience this if there's one thing I think we're all guilty of is promising to ourselves days that are not ours to promise death can come very very quickly to people I never come across that road without remembering the 1st of May 1997 just after 10 o'clock in the morning when I witnessed a fatal road accident a young girl 24 years of age

I estimate that from her time of being unaware of death as you and I are now to her being in eternity is less than 10 seconds we don't know but there is the free offer of the gospel presented to us the knowledge is there the witness is there everything that we have everything that we need far more than we have ever had and I plead and I pray with you friends that today because who knows whether we'll see tomorrow but we do know this that there is a tomorrow that we don't see and I plead and I pray that the spirit of the

Lord will so work in you that it will work that restlessness of spirit that will give you no rest until you find yourself reconciled to God and grace ties that scarlet cord of deliverance redemption and salvation in your heart and may God richly bless our time in his word today let's bow our heads O Lord our God we are before thee solemnize our knowledge today O Lord that there is yet to be in our experience a closer audience than this with thee that as we began our opening item of praise today it speaks of judgment and those who will stand and those who will not stand and we pray heavenly father that we would have our standing before thee accepted in the finished work of Christ that the efficacy of his blood would be blessed to each and every one of us that grace would tie the scarlet cord of salvation in our hearts this day O Lord if by our own admission we are strangers to God and to grace grant thy mercy grant thy blessing and as we conclude our final praise we do so O Lord taking up the great words of the psalmist where he reminds us that even in death's dark veil we can know thy nearness and thy presence and may it be O Lord that when we do pass through that veil we will have that peace and blessing and all we ask is in Christ Amen we conclude at this time singing from the well-known words of Psalm 23 the

Lord's my shepherd I'll not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by and surely the great words of verse 4 yea though I walk in death's dark veil yet will I fear none for thou art with me and thy rod and staff me comfort still the whole psalm in conclusion to God's praise the Lord's my shepherd the Lord's my shepherd I not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green near the O God, think within the paths of righteousness, in for his own sake.

[33 : 53] Ye though I walk in death, yes I fail, yet will I fear not hell, for thou art with me at thy heart, that shall become for still.

My table thou hast furnished, in presence o'er my foot, my head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.

Goodness and virtue all my life shall surely follow me, and then God's eyes forevermore, my dwelling place shall be.

Sovereign Father, we have stayed, been richly blessed to be here, gathered together in the courts of thy house, and we pray that it truly will be a blessing to us, so that long after we leave this place, we would experience thy word as a living word, constraining and restraining us in life, to see the brevity of life, to be furnished with wisdom, to have that faith and flower in our lives, that bears witness to thy greatness, and to thy goodness.

Bless thy servant who comes to lead the congregation this evening in worship. Remember their interim moderator, and bless him and keep him, and go before us as the breaker up of our way.

[36 : 47] Father, leave us not to ourselves, love us freely in Christ. Amen.