

Rahab - Remarkable Grace

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, for the time remaining, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. The book of Joshua, chapter 2.

Book of Joshua, chapter 2, and we'll just read the first verse. Joshua 2, from the beginning. And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim, a spy, saying, Go, view the land, especially Jericho.

And they went and came into the house of a prostitute, whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. So this evening I'd like us to continue our study of some of the women in the Bible.

And as we've progressed throughout the narrative of the Bible, we've looked at different women and the role that they have played in the story of redemption. Because in Genesis, right at the beginning, we considered Eve, who was the mother of all living.

Then we met Sarah, who was Abraham's wife. She was the mother of the covenant promise. Then we looked at Rebecca, who was Isaac's willing wife.

[1 : 1 5] She was willing to go with him. And then when we moved into Exodus, we were introduced to this woman called Jochebed, who was the faithful mother of Moses.

They were in Egypt at the time. And then last time, which was quite a while ago now, we encountered then, we encountered the sister of Moses, who was Miriam.

And looking at our study so far, I suppose that we could say that we've met mothers, we've met wives, and we have considered some daughters. And they're all the family roles that are quite familiar to us.

We're all familiar to mothers, daughters, and wives. But the person that we're introduced to here in Joshua chapter 2, although she was a daughter and she would later become a wife and a mother, this woman is always known and remembered, not for her knowledge, nor her position, or her family connections, but rather she is remembered for her career.

And her career was not one that you would desire yourself, or one that you would desire your children to have. Nor is it a role that you would want anyone to have in a society that treats women like objects.

[2 : 3 3] Because in this passage, we're introduced to a woman called Rahab, the prostitute. And yet, what's so wonderful about this prostitute is that she was also called a daughter of the King.

A daughter of King Jesus. She may have sold herself to the desires and the wants of men in her community, but she was bought by the blood of Christ, and she was redeemed by the grace of God.

Friends, Rahab is a trophy of God's remarkable grace. And she's a reminder to us all that there is no one in this world who is beyond the remarkable grace of God.

And so, this evening, I want us to consider Rahab. Rahab, this woman of remarkable grace. And I'd like us to do so under three headings. Rahab, the harlot.

Rahab, the heroine. And Rahab, the helpful example. Rahab, the harlot. Rahab, the heroine. And Rahab, the helpful example.

[3 : 48] So, we'll look firstly at Rahab, the harlot. Rahab, the harlot. We'll just read again in verse 1. Joshua, the son of Nun, sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, Go, view the land, especially Jericho.

And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. So, the context to this introduction to Rahab, the prostitute, it's one that's important.

Because in the previous chapter, in chapter 1, we're told that right at the beginning that Moses died. Verse 1. After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, Moses, my servant, is dead.

And so, Moses has died and now Joshua is the successor. And he is to lead the children of Israel in this new stage of their journey into the promised land.

Joshua was to lead the children out of the wilderness where they had been for the past 40 years. And they were to cross over the river Jordan into the promised land of Canaan.

[4 : 55] And so, in order to prepare the way, Joshua sends two spies into Jericho. Because Jericho was this fortified city. It was surrounded by a thick wall.

And it was situated right on the border of the promised land. And so, it would be the first city that Joshua and his army would have to contend with when they were entering into Canaan.

And so, we're told that these spies, they went and came to the house of a harlot or a prostitute named Rahab. And they lodged there. And you know, for centuries, there has been a lot of debate over the interpretation of the word harlot.

Some have concluded that Rahab was just an innkeeper. Where she ran this hotel for all the travelers who were passing through the city of Jericho.

And even John Calvin, back in the 16th century, he was addressing this difference of opinion. Because he says in his commentary, he says, Why some try to avoid the name harlot and interpret it as one who keeps a name, I don't understand.

[6 : 05] Unless it is that they wish to wipe off any stigma from such a woman, who not only received these spies, but secured their safety by her courage and her prudence.

And so, for Calvin, Rahab the harlot was Rahab the harlot. She was a prostitute. Because that's the way in which scripture always describes her.

She is always known as Rahab the prostitute. But this prostitute did keep an inn. Because her house, as we're told in verse 15, it was built into the fortified walls of the city.

The city of Jericho. And she was, as I suppose you could call it, she was the travel inn on the outskirts of the city. And she provided both this lodging for travelers to lodge in, and also favors for her customers.

Rahab ran both a hotel and a brothel. Which inevitably leads to the question, why did the spies go there? Well, it wasn't to be a customer of the prostitute, but it was to conceal their identity.

[7 : 18] Because who would ever think that spies belonging to God's people would be found in a brothel? But what's even more magnificent is God's work of providence in bringing these spies into contact with the most unlikely Christian.

Because who would have thought that the Lord would be working in an ungodly city full of idolatry? And who would have thought that out of all the people within the city of Jericho, the only person who was seeking the Lord was the local prostitute.

But more than that, who would have thought that the house which God was working in was a brothel? Because Rahab, she was an outcast, who not only lived on the fringes of the city and on the fringes of society, she was one stop short of rejection.

Her unclean and distasteful career, it had left her with nothing going for her, apart from the fact she was this object to satisfy the lusts of men.

And so from a human perspective, Rahab was undeserving of salvation. She was the most unlikely candidate to have grace working in her heart.

[8 : 34] And yet, God in his remarkable providence and grace, he was working all things together for good. And I think there is a lesson for us here.

Because whether we admit it or not, we are sometimes guilty of subconsciously categorising people, especially when it comes to the gospel and salvation.

We gauge a person's interest in the gospel on the basis of their background, or their lifestyle, or their appearance.

What I mean by background, it's simply whether they are an incomer or not. I often hear people say that there are so many incomers in our communities now who don't understand the way we do things here, and the way we do church, and the way we keep the Sabbath.

But I don't ever hear people saying, what I don't hear them saying is that they have invited them to church, or that they've spoken to them about their need of Jesus. And the same is true with a person's lifestyle.

[9 : 42] We think that we can gain a person's interest in the gospel if they're an alcoholic, or a drug addict, or a gambling addict, or they're homosexual, or they have mental problems, or they're homeless.

They're different to the norm. And we immediately think that they wouldn't be interested in hearing about God's amazing love of them, and the price that Jesus paid for sinners to be saved.

But not only that, we often make a judgment according to appearance too. Whether it's clothing, or jewelry, or earrings, or tattoos, whatever it is, we often gauge another person's interest according to our judgment.

Maybe we don't intend to, but we do do it. And I'm speaking to myself when I say this, not just to you, because we subconsciously do it immediately when we see someone.

But at the same time, we are subconsciously putting boundaries on the grace of God. Of course, we want them to be saved, we want everyone to be saved, but truth be told, we don't want to go near them, and we don't want to be the one to tell them.

[10 : 56] And we conclude in some sense that they are unreachable. And yet, what we see here with Rahab the harlot living in a brothel within a city of idolatry, is that God's grace knows no boundaries.

God's grace knows no boundaries. Which means that when Jesus said, whosoever, when he said, whosoever believeth in him shall not perish and shall have everlasting life, he meant it.

He meant it. But how did Rahab the harlot come to faith? How did she come to believe in the living and through God? And you know, the Apostle Paul, he asked the same question in Romans 10.

He said, how shall they believe in whom they have not heard? And Paul's conclusion was that faith comes by hearing. And that's how Rahab's faith came.

Her faith came by hearing. And that's what we're told in verse 8. If you look at verse 8, it says, before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof 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.

[12 : 18] 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.

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.

Rahab had heard all about what the Lord had done in redeeming the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt and defeating their enemies in the wilderness.

And this had an effect upon her because it worked faith in her. When others in Jericho heard about what God had done, they melted with fear.

But for Rahab, she was filled with faith because Rahab had heard about the story of redemption and how the Lord saves people and she wanted to be saved for herself.

[13 : 20] Of course, there was so much of the faith and of the history of the people of Israel that Rahab didn't know. But she wasn't saved by her knowledge. She was saved by God's remarkable grace through her faith in the God of heaven, in the God of the heaven above and the earth beneath.

And that's the confession she makes here in verse 11. That the God that she believes in is the God in heaven above and the earth beneath.

But you know what's interesting is how Rahab heard about the story of redemption. Because Rahab probably heard from all her clients.

She heard about the redeemer of God's elect through those who were using her for prostitution. But you know it doesn't matter how she heard. That's not important.

What's important is that she did hear. And that it was on hearing that her heart changed and her life was transformed. And so from a human perspective Rahab was the most unlikely candidate.

[14 : 33] But faith came by hearing. And that's why we need to be encouraging those in our homes and in our community and in our workplaces to be under the sound of the gospel.

We need to be inviting people and encouraging them to come to church. I know it's hard. I know it's not easy to bring it up in a conversation. But try it.

because faith as the Bible promises faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. My friend we need to be encouraging people to hear the story of redemption.

We need to tell them the old old story. Because as the hymn writer said tell me the old old story of unseen things above of Jesus and his glory.

Of Jesus and his love. And that's the story that our friends and our neighbours and our work colleagues need to hear. Because it's that story which changes hearts and transforms lives.

[15 : 42] And that was the case with Rahab. Because when her faith came by hearing she was willing to risk her own life and put everything on the line in order to be saved. to the point that Rahab the harlot became Rahab the heroine or heroine which I suppose brings us to look secondly at this characteristic of Rahab.

Rahab the heroine secondly. If we look again at verse 1 Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim a spy saying go view the land especially Jericho and they went and came to the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there and it was told the king of Jericho behold men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab saying bring out the men who have come to you who entered your house for they have come to search out all the land but the woman had taken the two men and hidden them and she said through the men came to me but I did not know where they were from and when the gate was about to be closed at dark the men went out I do not know where the men went pursue them quickly for you will overtake them but she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof and so what we see here is that in his it's getting very very dark here isn't it can you see each other that's better

I'm disappearing sorry anyway so what we see here in verses 1 to 6 is that in his remarkable grace God not only converted Rahab but he also uses her for his own glory because as we asked earlier why did Joshua's spies why did they go to a brothel it wasn't to be the customer but it was to conceal their identity because who would ever think that spies belonging to the Lord's people would ever be found in the house of a prostitute but the reality was they were found out that's what we read the king of Jericho he sent men to fetch the spies who were in the house but it was in that moment that Rahab made this life changing decision because when that knock on the door came and the question was asked about the spies in her house Rahab as a citizen of the city of

Jericho she could have easily just handed them over to protect herself and her family but instead she risked everything in order to be saved and in that moment she left her past behind and she left her people behind and she distanced herself from her immoral trade and she separated herself from her idolatrous people from Jericho and then she cast her lot in with the Lord and with the God of redemption in that moment when the soldiers came Rahab the harlot became Rahab the heroine as she made this solitary stand for Christ where she hid the spies and she directed the men to look elsewhere Rahab acted in faith faith in the God of redemption but sadly this account of God's remarkable grace it has often been overshadowed by the question was it right for Rahab to lie and the obvious answer is no it's never right to lie and there's no such thing as a little lie or a white lie a lie is a lie the command is thou shalt not lie and I've heard some explain that it was okay for Rahab to lie because she was in a situation of war but that explanation doesn't hold with the rest of scripture however what I do want to say is that by focusing so narrowly upon the lie and whether it was right or wrong we miss the emphasis of the whole passage because the emphasis of the passage is upon

Rahab's faith and yet far too often we emphasize the lie above her faith but let's not single Rahab out as the only liar in the Bible because what did Abraham do when he went down to Egypt he told everyone that Sarah was his sister what did Isaac do when he was asked about Rebecca he told everyone that she was his sister what did David do when he committed adultery with Bathsheba he tried by deception to cover the whole thing up which means that there are many instances in the Bible of liars and deceivers and deniers and doubters and people who were disobedient but what's amazing about them all what's amazing about all these weak failures is that the Lord used them the Lord used them the Lord used Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and David and Jonah and Peter and Thomas and Paul he used them all and he uses you and he uses me in order to accomplish his plan and his purposes in this world and as I know what the Apostle

[21 : 28] Paul said to the church in Colombe a church that was full of deception and corruption and Paul says to them God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen to bring to nothing why so that no flesh should glory in his presence but only glory in the God who uses us in his wisdom righteousness sanctification and redemption therefore says Paul he that glories let him glory in the Lord and what Paul is saying to us is don't focus upon the failure don't narrow your focus upon the lie focus upon the God who uses failures for his own glory and in saying this I'm not trying to justify Rahab's actions in any way because I think that had she told the truth had she said yes they're hiding upstairs under some flats

I don't think the king's soldiers would have even come in to check because Rahab the prostitute she was an outcast of society she lived on the fringes of the city and the type of house she owned was the kind of place you would only step through the door you wouldn't step through it unless you were after more than a place to sleep but despite her lie the passage is emphasising her faith and it's stressing to us that the God who redeems is the God who forgives and he's the God who works all things together for good despite our weaknesses and all our failures but after that moment of casting her lot in with the people of God we see that Rahab sought assurance Rahab had faith but she wanted assurance for her faith and we're told about that in verse 12 it says now then please this is Rahab speaking 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 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 what we see there is that when

Rahab acted in faith she not only had herself in mind but she also had her entire family she had her entire family Rahab not only sought salvation for herself but all those she loved so dearly in this world their salvation was of primary importance to her as I'm sure that the salvation of our family is of primary importance to us but Rahab's request here it's quite amazing because when she says to the spies I have shown you kindness or I have dealt kindly with you the word kindness is a unique word in scripture because in Hebrew it's the word *chesed* a good word to remember *chesed* and it's often translated in the Bible as the word love or steadfast love and it usually only refers to the Lord's covenant love for his people where the

Lord bound himself in covenant and he promised to his people that throughout their journey through the wilderness and on into the promised land he said to them I will be your God and you shall be my people and his covenant love for them it's undeserved it's unbreakable unrestricted unconditional and it's an unchanging love and here is Rahab a converted prostitute and she's requesting that the Lord's people show to her that same covenant love that they have been shown Rahab's simple request is that she and her family are delivered from death and granted the promise and assurance of life and because of her faith Rahab's request is granted and the assurance of her faith was given on the basis of God's covenant love for his people because the assurance of

Israel's faith was God's covenant love and the blessings of that covenant and now Rahab and her family they are granted the assurance of their faith as they're brought in to receive all the blessings of the covenant but as it was with the children of Israel the blessings of the covenant were only received by obedience to the covenant and that's what the spies emphasize to Rahab in verse 14 it says 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 and what's interesting in verse 14 is that upon her obedience to remain silent Rahab and her family would experience the blessings of the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness that's what the words kindly and faithfully mean but they're also translated elsewhere in the Bible as grace and truth that's what we're singing about in

[27 : 24] Psalm 98 he mindful of his grace and truth to Israel's house hath been and the salvation of our God all ends of the earth have seen and that promise of God's grace and and truth being revealed it's fulfilled in the New Testament with the arrival of Jesus Christ because John tells us that when the word became flesh and dwelt among us we were enabled to behold his glory and it was a glory of the only begotten son of the father and he was full full of grace and truth and so the blessing which Rahab received was the blessing of the covenant the covenant which was affirmed in and through the covenant mediator Jesus Christ it was the blessing of being delivered from death and the promise and assurance of life and that's what all of the Lord's people receive when they live by faith they're brought to receive the blessings of the covenant of grace and the assurance of

God's steadfast love and faithfulness but what I love about this passage is the token that Rahab was given as her assurance because we're told in verse 18 the beginning of verse 18 it says behold when we come into the land you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down the scarlet cord which was to hang from Rahab's window was to be the token of her assurance it was this symbol of God's covenant love towards her and towards her family that they would be delivered from death and granted the promise of life and although we can't make too much of the scarlet cord we can't deny that its colour is significant and that this scarlet cord was the only thing that separated Rahab and her family from all the other homes in

Jericho that blood coloured cord was the only deterrent for Joshua and his army not to destroy Rahab's house it was the singular symbol of Rahab's deliverance from death and her promise of life and it was the same for the children of Israel when they were in Egypt during the first Passover the angel of the Lord passed over the homes of the Israelites because of the blood stained doorposts and lintels of their house and it was only because of the blood that they were delivered from death and given the promise of life and now that was Rahab's promise to us one of the Lord's people destruction would pass over her house because of the scarlet cord in the window and that's what happened because when we go to chapter 6 when Joshua and his army marched round the city of Jericho once a day for the first six days and then on the seventh day they marched around the city seven times and they shouted to the Lord and the walls fell but when the walls of Jericho fell we're told that Joshua saved alive

Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho Joshua saved alive these words are important because they literally mean Savior saved alive or they can be translated as Jesus saved alive because the name Joshua it's the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name Jesus and so Rahab's scarlet cord was a token of assurance that she would be saved alive by her Savior and of course that's how we're saved alive Jesus has saved us alive he has delivered us from death and given to us the promise of eternal life but the token of our assurance of God's love and faithfulness towards us it's not a scarlet cord or a blood stained door post but a blood stained cross and to quote another hymn where the hymn writer declared blessed assurance

Jesus is mine oh what a foretaste of glory divine heir of salvation purchased of God born of his spirit washed in his blood washed in his blood that's our assurance and so we've looked at Rahab the harlot Rahab the heroine but lastly and briefly I just want us to see that Rahab is a helpful example Rahab is a helpful example the bible tells us that we can learn a lot from this prostitute from Jericho and what we can learn from it is not only that God's grace has no boundaries but that faith in God has no limits because the Lord is able to use and to work through people we are inclined to reject but the bible reminds us and it it remembers Rahab not for her trade but for her faith because next to Sarah

[33 : 14] Rahab is the only other woman in the bible who is quoted in that list who act by faith in Hebrews 11 we're told in Hebrews 11 verse 31 by faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies Rahab was saved by grace through faith Rahab didn't just live by faith though Rahab lived out her faith she put her faith into action which is why she welcomed the spies but you know it's not only the letter of Hebrews that mentions Rahab because of her actions of faith it's also the letter of James because James in his letter he also draws attention to the prostitute of Jericho in chapter 2 as you know James is talking about faith and works and he says that although it's impossible to be saved by our works he says a faith without works is a dead faith a faith that isn't lived out and put into practice and evidenced in our lives is a dead faith it's a dead faith which means that Rahab is not only a helpful example of a woman whose faith was lived out she also ought to be a hard hitting challenge for us to consider whether or not our faith is a dead faith because we all need to ask ourselves am I living out my faith in my home and in my workplace am I living as a trophy of God's grace in this community am I living as an example of someone who has received that blessed assurance from Jesus

Christ because that's how Rahab lived she was a woman of remarkable grace who lived by faith and the Lord used her because even though her former life in Jericho was tainted by prostitution when she was freed from her sin and given the newness of life she came to live in the Israelite town of Bethlehem and there she married a man called Salmon and Salmon and Rahab they had a son called Boaz and Boaz got married to Ruth and down throughout the centuries Jesus came she was a descendant of Jesus she put her faith into action and so there we have it Rahab the harlot Rahab the heroine Rahab the helpful example she was a woman of remarkable grace used by the Lord when she acted in faith and who knows what the Lord can do in and through us if we follow

Rahab's example and act in faith may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray gracious God and loving heavenly father we give thanks to thee that thy grace is one that knows no boundaries and forgive us Lord if we ever put boundaries on it for Lord we confess that how often our mind is so guilty and how often we make judgments so quickly but help us Lord we pray or to be ready and to be willing to always give an answer for the reason for the hope that is within us for we have a great hope a hope that is sure and steadfast a hope that is the anchor of our soul help us Lord to live out our faith in this world help us to be the lights of the world the lights in darkness in our homes and in our workplace within our family and in our community that we Lord would serve thee that we would serve thee with gladness Lord remember us we pray bless those tonight who need thee remember

Michael especially take care of him we pray Lord grant him to know thy presence the peace of God that passes all understanding Lord we know that thou art one who knows the way that we take and when we have been tried we shall come forth as gold bless the family Lord we pray thee undertake for us all as we cast every care into thine hand knowing that thou art one who does care for us bless us and do us good for Jesus sake Amen I shall conclude by singing in Psalm 106 Psalm 106 that's page 378 in the Scottish Psalter Psalm 106 from the beginning down to the verse marked fine give praise and thanks unto the Lord for bountiful is he his tender mercy doth endure unto eternity God's mighty works who can express or show forth all his praise blessed are they that judgment keep and justly do always down to the verse marked five of

Psalm 106 to come as please give praise of thy son to the Lord for God's people is he his tender mercy doth and due unto eternity the mighty works to come express for show forth all his praise blessed are they that judgment he unjustly do always remember thee

[39 : 42] Lord with that love which thou to thine dost bear with thy salvation o my God to this set me draw near that I thy chosen could may see and in their joy rejoice and may with thy inheritance triumph with cheerful voice the grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now
and forever more amen