

## ***Rahab's Faith***

Trinity CRC, February 19, 2023 AM  
Profession & Baptism service

## **Joshua 2**

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People of God,

Have you ever been in one of those tough places in your life? When you're in a no-win situation? We say, "I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place." If you look to the right, you see a whole set of problems you'll face and if you look left you see another big set of problems to deal with. If you say "Yes" there are implications that make life difficult for you and if you say "No" there are other difficulties you foresee. So you really don't want to choose either option.

It seems to me in reading Joshua 2 that Rahab faced some difficult choices too. In some sense she was stuck between a rock and a hard place. She lived on the edge of Jericho, both physically and socially. Socially she was on the lowest rung of society as a prostitute, an unacceptable and unwanted person. She could have been abandoned by her husband and forced to work as a prostitute. Perhaps she thought this was the only way she could provide for her material needs. On the other hand, she may have willingly gone into that business. Either way, she was a social outcast. And physically she lived at the outside point of the city, in the city wall. People inside the wall just put up with her but probably very few people really wanted to befriend her. Most people from Jericho didn't have anything to do with her and those who did "business" with her probably weren't going to admit it.

Looking at Israel, she probably wouldn't have imagined a life that was any better. How could it be? If she went to their side, she'd be even more of an outcast because she is a Gentile, not a Jew. She wouldn't fit in there. And she didn't feel accepted among her own people. She was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

As I said, physically, the house of the prostitute was near the gate of the city, either built on top of the wall or right into the wall. Given how she let the men down the wall from her house, it was probably at the top of the wall. Sometimes there was an inner and outer wall and the homes of a prostitute like Rahab would have been built on beams that stretched across the span from the outer wall to the inner wall. So, rocks or spears or flaming arrows that came over the wall from an enemy were likely to hit her house first. Living "in the line of fire" from the enemy made life pretty scary for her too, especially when the enemy was strong and to be feared.

So Rahab is just one step short of rejection within the walls of Jericho and the enemy coming from the outside is a threat to her as well since she lives on the wall of the city. Moreover, it's important to note that before she makes any offer to save the lives of the two spies, she has no idea if protecting them is going to be a good choice. In that way too she is stuck between a rock and a hard place. She's not really acceptable in Jericho or in Israel. But siding with Jericho will mean death if Israel wins the battle and siding with Israel may mean death anyway. She doesn't know if they will spare her life. Very tough choices.

What about you? What choice are you facing in your life? Maybe you've made bad decisions in your life that put you in a difficult position with other people, maybe family members or friends. Maybe you've done nothing wrong but you've been rejected and forced to feel like a social outcast? You may feel unlovable for any number of reasons. You might be concerned about some unwanted pressure you see coming upon you. In my work-life right now, I'm dealing with issues at our classis that feel like a no-win situation. These things are tough.

Whether you're feeling stuck between a rock and a hard place or not, we'll all face challenges in life. The bottom line is this: who or what is the object of your faith? Who or what is the object of your faith?

## **The Object of Your Faith**

That was the question facing Joshua and his people as well as Rahab. Israel had a reason to be worried about the enemies she was facing. The Canaanites had superior weapons and a trained standing army. Israel was not ready for battle. She was on her way out of the dusty desert where she lived for 40 years. Her skilled army paled in compared to the Canaanite war machine. As she came upon Jericho, her weapon was a trumpet, it seemed.

However, the Lord had already demonstrated to Israel on the east side of the Jordan that he would give them victory. Israel defeated two kings there, Sihon and Og. I don't see any details of what the battle looked like. It merely says, the Lord gave those armies and kings into the hands of Israel and that the kings were put the sword (Num 21, Deut 2-3). So they had some weapons but, most of all, they had the Lord on their side. The Lord used Israel to push back their opposition decisively and thoroughly. And that news spread to the Promised Land where Rahab lives.

As this book begins, we see Joshua and Israel prepared to trust the Lord. At the end of chapter 1 the two and half tribes with land on the east side of the Jordan River are told by Joshua that the Lord expects them to join in the battle for the Promised Land on the west side of Jordan. Expressing strong faith,

*Josh 1:16 Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. <sup>17</sup> Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses.*

The ones saying those words make it clear that they are trusting the Lord. As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, learning to trust the Lord was Israel's number 1 "job" during their 40 years in the wilderness.

Flip back to the book of Deuteronomy, for example, and just look at some of the heading listed in an NIV Bible. Starting at chapter 26, I see things like "Firstfruits and Tithes", indicating that Israel was learning to put the Lord first in their finances. Chapter 27 is the Altar at Mount Ebal where again Israel is told to set up stone tablets with the law of God inscribed on them and placed before the people as a reminder of how to live in the Promised Land. Again, keep God first. That follows with the curses of disobedience and chapter 28 speaks of the

“Blessings of Obedience.” Then there’s “Covenant Renewal” in chapter 29 where the people recommit themselves to keeping God first as they move forward. That’s all about God’s people learning and professing to put their faith in him.

Here in our reading today, two spies enter Jericho and meet Rahab. I’m certain that they were more than a little surprised to hear her say that she was putting her faith in their God as well. But that’s what they heard, starting in v.8:  
*Josh 2:8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she (Rahab) went up on the roof<sup>9</sup> and said to them, “I know (that’s a faith word) that the LORD has given this land to you 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*

Her profession of faith in these words is similar to the call to faith that Moses gave to Israel near the end of their time in wilderness and just after they had conquered Sihon and Og, whom Rahab speaks about. In Deuteronomy 4:39 Moses calls to his people,

*Dt 4:39 Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.*

That’s almost word for word what Rahab confessed, without having heard Moses’ words.

The faith of Rahab is noteworthy. But it is the God she confesses that we must focus on. Rahab is a prime example of a sinner saved grace. She’s a prime example of someone who is lost in darkness and doomed to destruction, but God in his mercy welcomes her in his family. Rather than just sparing her life, he enfolds her into the people of Israel. In fact, listen to this. She becomes an ancestor of our Lord Jesus, the great grandmother of King David, according to Matthew 1.

Our focus falls too quickly on great people or people we think are great Christians. But that’s not where it belongs. Even great Christians are saved by grace through faith. We can learn from them. But ultimately we must know that the God they serve is great because he welcomes us into covenant with him as well. He’s great because he is the sovereign God of heaven and earth. Israel confessed it. Rahab confessed it. *“The Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other.”* The object of faith is the Lord God Almighty, God of heaven and earth.

This same Lord God is the one who gives the victory over our enemies today. When Jesus came as the Son of God to earth, he demonstrated over and over again that he had authority over all things in heaven and earth. Satan departed from him after failing to successfully tempt Jesus on the temple mount. Near Jericho, Jesus healed people of their diseases. Blind Bartemaeus, for example, called out as Jesus was leaving Jericho, *“Jesus, Son of David, have*

*mercy on me!*” The Lord Jesus then demonstrates the sovereign and almighty power of God in healing that man (Mk 10:46ff). Another time Jesus entered **Jericho** and found Zaccheaus up in the tree (Lk 19:1ff). Like Rahab many years before, he was an outcast of society because he was a tax-collector. Yet Jesus went to his home to eat with him, showing everyone that the God of heaven and earth has mercy on all who turn to him in faith, regardless of past sins, sickness or earthly status.

So Rahab, Bartemeaus, Zaccheaus and you and I can turn to the Lord God as the Sovereign of heaven and earth to find that he in mercy receives us and helps us because of Jesus. And that is what we celebrate in the Profession of Faith of Walter and the baptism of Joel. Jesus is our Saviour. Amen! In him we have the victory! Amen! We turn unfilled to Jesus. We come to him with all of life’s sorrows and our rejection and pain from people. We come from our lives between a rock and a hard place and we must hear Jesus offer us his grace and mercy. He offers us reconciliation with God, a place in the family of God, and healing grace for the brokenness in our lives. He offers us strength to make the right choices in life—hard as they may be at times. He is our sovereign Lord, our loving Saviour. He’s completely trustworthy and is therefore the object of our faith.

### **Watch and Be Amazed**

Like Rahab, then, when we put our faith in Jesus, we can watch and be amazed. Notice how the Lord in whom we trust is trustworthy. He makes it clear to Israel as well as to Rahab that he will fight our battles for us. He goes ahead of us. The spies come into Jericho and immediately the word is out that they’ve arrived. Everyone is scared to death of the Israelites, even or maybe especially, the king. God has put the fear of Israel in the hearts of the nations—just as he said he would. Forty years earlier he told Israel,

*Ex 15:14 The nations will hear and tremble;  
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.*

It is crazy that the army of Jericho or any other city of Canaan with their fortified cities and superior weapons and armies should be scared of what may have seemed to be a rag tag people coming out of the desert, virtually unarmed. But the Lord had gone ahead of them. He melted the hearts of the Canaanites even before Israel arrived.

The beautiful part of this story is watching the Lord go ahead of his people. He calls them in chapter 1 to be strong and courageous. And then we watch as he removes the courage of the strong Canaanites armies even at the sight of just two Israelite spies; in fact, even before they arrive—because they heard about God’s hand of care over Israel in earlier battles and their deliverance from Egypt 40 years earlier—they are melting in fear. That’s why Rahab confessed to the spies,

*Josh 2:11 When we (the people of Jericho) heard of it (that is Israel’s success against Sihon and Og), our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*

So, there we have it. The Lord our God is the object of our faith for good reasons. He goes ahead of us. He fights our battles for us. And even when we've made a mess of our lives like Rahab, he is able to bring us out of that hard place and into fellowship with him and his people.

We must turn to him and find his embrace, his grace and love. He offers it to us in a special way each Sunday, through his word and the sacraments like baptism and the Lord's Supper. He says to us in baptism, "I am your God and you are my people. I'll mark you as mine. Now live for me, trust me with your whole life. In the Lord's Supper, he says, "Take this bread, drink this cup as a sign and seal of my covenant love for you as you continue to live for me each day. Know that I have conquered even death so I can handle all your enemies and problems now and always."

So, what challenges is the Lord putting before you? We believe in a sovereign God. It was no surprise to him that the spies found a believing prostitute in the city wall. It was no surprise to him that the soldiers listened to her so quickly and quickly left the city in pursuit of the spies instead of first thoroughly checking out her place. Since when did anyone trust the word of a prostitute? But the Lord took care of all the details and the spies and Rahab were undoubtedly amazed.

Friends, with a sovereign God in charge of our lives, anything is possible. With the way to God paved for us with the powerful and precious blood of Jesus, we can know that as Jesus conquered sin and death, he can get us out of those tough places we find ourselves in between a rock and a hard place, whether we feel more like the spies or like Rahab. Trust him, move forward in faith, and be amazed as he provides.

Friends, with the Lord our God on the throne of the world and on the throne of your heart, follow him with all your heart! Trust him. Do his will. Watch and be amazed for he is greater than any opposition we face and he crushes every rock or hard place.