

## ***Women of Jesus' Genealogy: Rahab***

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Advent 2

**Joshua 2**

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Dear People of God,

Do you ever wonder if your life makes any difference in the kingdom of God? Do you wonder if your sin disqualifies you from enjoying God's kingdom or being used for his purposes? On the flip side, do you ever look down on some people as unqualified for God's kingdom, unworthy of use by the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth?

Maybe think of the thief on the cross next to Jesus who confessed Jesus as God. I'm sure he never expected to be known and included in the Bible. The same could be true for the Bethlehem shepherds who came to see Jesus on the night of his birth. And what about a prostitute in downtown Jericho?

Surprise! From our Bible reading we know that Rahab is INDEED used by God! In fact, she's given honourable mention in the family line of Jesus. Matthew 1:5 tells us, *Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab*. She's also in a list of heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses; the people of Israel as a whole are listed for walking through the Red Sea on dry land and then again for marching around the city of Jericho as God commanded. And right after that, Rahab comes up in the list.

Rahab is one more in a series of people who don't belong by ethnicity but are welcomed into God's people by faith and used in his service.

### **The Kingdom of Faith**

You see, God is building a kingdom of people of faith.

The story starts in v.1 with Joshua secretly sending spies to check out Canaan and especially Jericho.

It's noteworthy that this story starts out with Israel at Shittim. That's how you pronounce that name. The emphasis on the end—'im'. That helps when you read it with English eyes 😊. Shittim is located near the Jordan River. And its mention here makes us think back to a previous story.

In the time of Balaam, in Numbers 25, Israel rejected the Lord as their God at Shittim by prostituting themselves with Moabite women and gods (Num 25:1–3; 31:16). The idea of prostituting themselves is important. You get the connection to our story today?

We also have to read this story in light of the last time some spies were sent by God to check out the Promised Land. Back then Israel had just come out of

Egypt and God told them he'd be giving them the land of the Canaanites. He told Moses to send 12 spies to scout out the land and bring back a report.

Boys and girls, do you remember that story? Twelve spies went to the land and they were impressed. Great crops growing in the fields. Plenty of water. It was a land of milk and honey—a land of plenty. But when most of the spies see some of the people, they melt in fear. Ten of the 12 report back to Moses that the people are giants and they advise against going to take the land. They say that the people are too strong! They'll wipe us out! The spies are afraid.

What does God think of that? Well, he is displeased with the lack of faith, remember? In response, the LORD kept Israel in the wilderness for 40 years until that whole generation of the spies had died. The whole generation died except the 2 spies who had faith and believed that the Lord would give them the land. Those two spies were Caleb and Joshua. Joshua is now the leader of Israel. He's the one who now sends two new spies to Jericho.

And this time things are different! Praise God. This time the spies return filled with faith in God, right? Yes, the end of the chapter says,  
*Josh 2:24 They said to Joshua, "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."*

It's a beautiful reversal. Last time Israel was in Shittim, she was a spiritual prostitute but this time a Canaanite prostitute is graciously brought to faith by the Lord and points Israel to their own faithful, covenant keeping God, The LORD. Last time the 10 of the 12 spies were melting in fear at the site of the Canaanites. Now the spies are filled with faith while the Canaanites are reportedly melting in fear!

The common denominator for Rahab and the spies is faith.

The power of God and his blessing on Israel has not escaped Rahab's sight. Everyone around her is melting in fear. However, Rahab's fear is turned to faith. That's the mark of the kingdom of God. She confesses faith in Israel's God as the one true God of heaven and earth (v.11). And as such, she is welcomed into the family of God by two faith-filled Israelite spies. She is promised a place among them.

What is sobering, humbling and comforting, my friends, is that no one in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 is saved because he or she is such a great person. Rather, despite their flaws—some very obvious ones—they are welcomed into God's family through faith! That faith results in certain actions. That's what we find in the words of Hebrews 11:31 about Rahab.

*Heb 11:31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.*

The statement starts with faith: by faith or because of her faith, Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies and her life was spared when God gave Israel the city of Jericho.

God's kingdom is marked by people of faith. That's the point. Whether you're an Israelite or a Canaanite isn't the measure. Faith is! Whether you're a man or a woman, a boy or girl, isn't the measure. Faith is! For that matter, sexual orientation isn't the measure. Faith is! Likewise, whether you're black, brown or white isn't the measure. Faith is! Whether you're rich or poor isn't the measure. Faith is! And, friends, the sin you struggle with and the sin you've committed isn't the measure. Faith is how we are included. God doesn't measure us by our past or anything else we humans use to differentiate ourselves from one another. God doesn't measure us by standards we use to try make ourselves appear better than others.

Ultimately, our worth comes to us through God's long-awaited Messiah. The long-awaited birth of Jesus opens the way for us all to be saved by faith alone. Because Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for us, we can be saved by faith in him. Our record wiped clean. Our sin no longer held against us. Most importantly, we are welcomed into the family of God by faith in Jesus.

### **The Growing Kingdom**

Rahab's faith, dear church, is important because it's evidence of God's growing kingdom. Yes, it's, first of all, a kingdom based on faith in the LORD. But, secondly, the LORD means for it to be a kingdom that is filled with people from all nations.

It is important for the spies and all of Israel to learn that the LORD has people of faith outside of Israel too. His growing kingdom is based on faith, not ethnicity, so people of all nations, tribes and tongues are welcome. Sure, Israel was the chosen people of God but that was for a time and for a purpose. Despite Israel's repeated failures—their own prostitution—God has raised up people—sometime even people like Rahab from other nations—to carry out his plan to bring Jesus to our world as the Saviour of all the peoples of the world.

Here's the thing: God's people have been chosen in the past and still are chosen in the present to be a light to the nations. God's plan for Israel was to live in fellowship with him so that other nations would see him and put their faith in him as well. And that is what we find in Rahab. The light of God's power and grace shines through Israel. Rahab and those around her have seen—or at least heard about—God's power and glory at work among his people.

Rahab refers to God's power in delivering Israel from Egypt 40 years earlier. That memory has apparently not faded. The people of Canaan heard what happened to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. For 40 years, they've known that those former slaves are living in the desert. Then most recently the people of Jericho have heard that God has given Israel victory over Sihon and Og, two mighty kings on the other side of the Jordan River. They clearly see that Israel is on the move and, more importantly, their God is on the move. Nothing will stand in his way.

Rahab notices God's favour for his people and puts her faith in this God of Israel. So the kingdom is growing.

There's one pretty cool thing **to think about** here: Why did God send those spies to Jericho? We aren't told. In fact, we aren't even told that God sent the spies. We read that Joshua did so secretly or quietly. We can—safely, I think—assume that Joshua was following God's direction. After all, Joshua didn't need to spy on Jericho to see what he was up against. God had promised him in chapter 1 already that the land of the Canaanites would be given to Israel. Plus, God was going to give the city of Jericho to them by simply walking around it. No battle would be engaged. So I agree with Dr. James Boice who writes, "[I]t is reasonable to think that the spies **are sent to save Rahab**.... Joshua did not need information about Jericho; what he needed were the arrangements for saving Rahab and her family." Isn't that wonderful if that was God's express purpose in sending the spies? Isn't that just like the LORD? He's about saving people from destruction. Our sovereign LORD sees the faith of Rahab and sets out to save her.

This adds to the strength of the Bible's message of God's grace and saving work through Israel for all the nations. People of other nations come into the kingdom of God by his grace through faith in him.

From what is less explicit in the Old Testament era, we learn very clearly in the New Testament of God's intentional call to reach the nations. Jesus tells us, "You are the light of the world" and calls us to make disciples of all nations. Moreover, Peter tells former pagans,

*1 Pet 2:9 ...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

You see, dear friends, God still calls his people to be a light to the nations because his kingdom is a growing kingdom, open to all sorts of people by faith.

In fact, this is part of what we are waiting for in this season of advent. The first coming of Jesus brought him to the world as the Saviour for people of all nations. At his return, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is LORD. Rahab's confession to the spies is a foretaste of this day, a time when people from all tribes and nations will bow as one before the LORD. Revelation 15, for example, tells us of the victorious people of God. It says,

*Rev 15:4b All nations will come  
and worship before you..."*

That's one of the things we will see fully when Christ returns, and his kingdom is fully established.

For now, though, the salvation of all nations means—praise God—that you and I are also welcome in the kingdom. We are made worthy through Christ to sing praise to God's holy name and to be used for his purposes as part of his growing, eternal kingdom.

## **The Kingdom Fruit**

Finally, we notice that our faith in the Lord will bear fruit—kingdom fruit—regardless of our earthly nationality or any other identifier. In a word, faith leads to obedience, a desire to do God’s will. We become his servants.

This is the obedience we see manifested in Rahab, especially when we contrast her to the prostituted Israel of Shittim from earlier days. Rahab confesses the LORD God of Israel as the one true God of heaven and earth. Then she acts in accordance with that confession, even when it’s hard. Even when it removes the earthly security of her city, king and soldiers and friends. She trades that in, puts her faith in Israel’s God, and her life now bears fruit for God’s kingdom—allegiance to the LORD above all else.

It’s important to remember that everyone comes into the kingdom by grace through faith! But James in his letter makes it clear that faith which does not result in God-focused action or faith-induced fruit is not true or living faith. He uses Rahab as an illustration, saying,

*James 2:25 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? <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

Just to clarify, Rahab’s deeds were righteous. But they didn’t make her righteous in the sight of God. Faith did that. But faith resulted in righteous fruit.

Actually, this story has lots of kingdom fruit. Rahab saved the lives of the spies. Likewise, the spies saved the lives of Rahab and her family. Joshua honoured the word of the spies and, according to chapter 6, made sure the spies went into Jericho to rescue Rahab and her family when God conquered the city for Israel. There was a lot of hospitality being shared. Kingdom fruit by the basket full!

So let’s wrap this up now with some thoughts about our kingdom fruit. Our full and free salvation in Christ makes us want to do God’s will. To trust him and obey him.

Sometimes the decision to obey and follow God’s call on our life is harder than other times. Not all of us will have to leave our home, our town and our nation in order to obey the LORD like Rahab did. However, even close to home it’s not always easy to say *no* when everyone else is saying *yes*. Can you imagine how tough it would have been for Rahab to protect God’s people when the king of Jericho sent his soldiers to her house? Yet the Lord gave her strength, blessed her choice, blessed Israel through her and was glorified. Yes, Rahab escaped Jericho, she joined the Israelites and even married into the tribe of Judah. God blessed her and used her obedience to bless many generations right up to Jesus’ birth.

Whether big decisions or small, each choice we make is an opportunity follow the Lord. When it’s hard to decide and even harder to do, be assured that the Lord will bless your obedience. It will bear kingdom fruit, even if it isn’t real obvious to you. Sometimes an act of faith done today doesn’t show fruit for several years or maybe much longer.

So, it's important to remember God can use you. God doesn't care what we **were**. When he calls us, he sees us as new creatures in Christ. The old is gone. The new has come. Pray daily for the power of the Holy Spirit and don't doubt that God can use your smallest obedience to accomplish his plans.

Friends in Christ, it doesn't matter what our status is in the world. It doesn't matter what sins we've committed in our lives. It doesn't matter what other people think of us. It doesn't matter our background, whether in the covenant family for generations or just making your entrance into the family of God. It doesn't matter what your gift-set is. Likewise, it doesn't matter if you're shy or outgoing. God can use anyone, even the most unlikely.

In fact, those are the people God most often uses! He chose Rahab as another example of what he does over and over. He redeems and uses the unlikely all the time. He picks David as the least from among his brothers and anoints him as king. When a famine happened in Elijah's day, he was sent to a widow—a poor widow at that—in the remote village of Zarephath. And God used her to provide for his servant and supply others with oil. Over and over, the least are chosen to be used by God.

In the NT, our Lord Jesus comes to us as one from the smallest of towns, one by worldly standards which makes him a nobody. But this is what Jesus signed up for. He came to be a nobody among us to make us a somebody before his Father.

So in his kingdom, he chooses the unlikely as his disciples. Fisherman from Galilee rather than seminarians from Jerusalem. Jesus experienced discrimination based on things that don't matter in God's kingdom. When people heard him preach with authority, they declared that nothing good could come out of Nazareth, another insignificant village of Galilee. When a prostitute in Jesus' time came and anointed his feet with oil and her tears, everyone else sneered at her indignity. But Jesus praised her humble, servant heartedness and said she would be remembered forever. When the Lord meets the Samaritan woman at the well, she too is battered by life and feeling unworthy of love. She can't even think of being used by God. But after a brief encounter with the Lord, her life is changed and she is used by him to share the good news with many in her village.

Friends, our unlikely King, the Lord Jesus, touches the hearts of unlikely people all throughout history. He changes us from the inside and we become beautiful vessels in his service, bearing the fruit of the kingdom of God. We are all pictures of God's grace. Blessed by God to continue to build a kingdom where all sorts of people are welcome, just as we've been welcomed. Thanks be to God.