

Joshua 2 – “Redemption in Jericho”

2:1-3 - Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. ² And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country.” ³ So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country.”

Joshua follows in the footsteps of Moses by sending spies into the land. But this was a little different. The first time, Moses sent 12 spies into the land to survey whether they stood a chance or not. Moses sent the spies saying, “*see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; ¹⁹ whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds;*” (Numbers 13:18-19).

That scenario ended tragically because 10 of the 12 came back with a bad report. And they discouraged the rest of the Israelites. It didn’t matter what the land was like or what they found there because God was giving them the land. He had already given it to them, they just needed to possess it. And as a result, they remained in the wilderness for that generation of unbelief to die out.

Joshua and Caleb on the other hand were the only two spies that returned with a good report. They said to the children of Israel, “*The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. ⁸ If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’ ⁹ Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them*” (Numbers 14:7b–9).

So, we get the idea that Joshua is not sending spies to see if they can conquer the land, he’s sending spies to strategize how to conquer the land. They are scoping things out in a strategic manner.

Hebrew tradition tells us these two spies were Caleb and Eliezer the High Priest. Who they were isn’t really important though, the exciting thing is that God is going to have a different mission in mind as these two spies go in. Not only is this going to be a strategic mission, it’s going to be a salvation mission.

God has been giving the people of Canaan 40 years to turn to the Lord (Genesis 15:13, 16). God showed His mercy and longsuffering, but the Canaanites showed their hardness of heart and depravity – except for one person that is revealed in this second chapter of Joshua. And God will not judge the righteous with the wicked. So, the spies coming into the land is not just for scouting purposes, it's for salvation purposes. We'll get to that in a moment.

But the first city they come to is a formidable city located in Canaan – Jericho. It's just northwest of the Dead Sea, 7 miles west of the Jordan river and one of the first main cities you would come to when crossing over.

Many of the larger cities in Canaan operated as city states, almost like they were their own little kingdom with their own king to preside over them. That was the case with Jericho.

Historians tell us that Jericho was surrounded by a double wall. Its outer wall was 6 feet thick and the inner wall 12 feet thick. The first wall was 11 feet high and the second was 35 feet high and it was tilted at a 35 degree angle to make scaling it a thing of difficulty.

- If you aren't being led by faith you'd be looking at this place and saying, *'We're staying on the other side of the Jordan.'*

2:4-7 - Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. ⁵ And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them." ⁶ (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.) ⁷ Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate.

Here we see Rahab lie to protect the two spies that had come into her house. It presents an interesting moral and ethical dilemma. Do certain situations justify lying?

- I'm sure we've all been in those situations where we feel lying is helpful or protective and it doesn't seem like a big deal.
- Some people have no problem fudging numbers a bit on their income taxes. And I find that quite shocking. This is not the kind of world in which I want to raise my 32 dependents!

Regarding lying, let's be clear, the Bible never commends it or condones it, it just records it. It's a sin and human temptation by which people have succumbed to. Many great men in the Bible lied – Abraham, Samson, David. But never was it acceptable. Remember this is the one thing God cannot do (Numbers 23:19). Other Scriptures are clear in this area:

- **Exodus 20:16**, *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."*
- **Proverbs 12:22**, *"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight."*
- **Ephesians 4:25**, *"Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another."*
- **Colossians 3:9**, *"Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,"*
- **Revelation 22:15**, *"But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie."*

Now those that would excuse Rahab's lie would say that it was acceptable because of a greater value – that being the lives of the spies. The protection of their lives held a higher value than the truth in that situation. That's how some would justify it.

- Without excusing her we need to remember the custom of this day in the area of hospitality. Anyone who came under your roof you protected to your utmost ability. Remember Lot with the 2 angels? So Rahab may have been simply doing her duty.
- Now put it in a bit more modern times. What would you do during a time of war as in the days of Nazi Germany when they were ready to kill the Jews unmercifully? If one came to your house in an attempt to escape would you rat them out? I had a chance to visit Corey Ten Boom's house this summer in Holland and see the room where her family hid the Jews. When the Gestapo came to their door would you think it wrong to say you didn't have anyone else there?
- Now again, I'm not trying to make a case for situational ethics and justifying lying. I can't condone what God condemns.
- What we do need to remember is that God is bigger than these things and He is the one who can and will bring protection. It's often a wiser move to just remain silent when at all possible.

...hidden them with the stalks of flax... These spies found a covering; protection in this flax. Flax is where linen comes from. The High Priest was to wear linen on the day of Atonement. **Leviticus 16:3–4**, *“Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering. ⁴ He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on.”*

Just as the High Priest was covered in linen, we too have found a covering and protection in a robe of righteousness provided through Jesus Christ:

- **Isaiah 61:10**, *“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness...”*
- **Colossians 3:3**, *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*

2:8-11 - Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, ⁹ and said to the men: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. ¹⁰ For 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 the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹ And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

It's amazing to see this kind of faith in such a woman. It's a reminder that though the book of Joshua is one of conquest and judgment, the book begins with a story of God's mercy and not of His wrath.

To see the extent of God's mercy it might be good to look at the things that were stacked up against a woman like Rahab.

- 1) She was a Gentile. Now we know that through Jesus, salvation has come to the whole world; for every person. And though there were cases in the Old Testament where Gentiles were brought into the fold, the work of the Lord at this time was operating through the Jewish people. Jesus Himself would say that salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22). Rahab was an outsider. She was, as Paul would later say to the Ephesians, *“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and*

without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). She didn't have a lot going for her... but God.

- 2) She was an Amorite. Jericho was part of the Amorite kingdom. The Amorites were a particularly depraved people and pagan culture. They were so evil that God thoroughly condemned them and commanded the Israelites to wipe them from the face of the earth. **Deuteronomy 20:17**, *"but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you,"* So because of her lineage, she deserved to be taken out.
- 3) She was a Prostitute. Now some scholars have tried to downplay this and say that this word in the Hebrew could also mean innkeeper. But it says here, I believe intently, that she's a harlot. In fact, when she's described in the New Testament, the word used there in the Greek leaves no wiggle room, it's a word that means strongly a harlot. This is not the kind of person you typically think is so open and receptive to the gospel. In fact, it may be the kind of person that some would look down on and think they're too far gone. Yet, it's to Rahab that the Lord sends these two spies to on a great rescue mission.

Keep in mind, it's very inconspicuous for these spies to go to the house of a harlot. They were not there for personal reasons; they were there because this would have given them the most anonymity and avoided questions from foreigners.

Rahab is a very interesting woman in Scripture. We've seen what she had going against her, but here's what she had going for her, she's heard the Word of the Lord! But not only did she hear it, she believed it!

Look at what she says starting in vs. 9: ***I know that the Lord has given you the land... ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt...***

She had complete certainty and faith that the Lord has given them the land. How did she know? She's heard the Word.

- **Romans 10:17**, *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*
- Don't underestimate the power of the Word of God. Rahab didn't need some experience or encounter with angels or some sort of sign. She just heard the Word and faith began to well up in her.

She's heard about the great miracles God performed for Israel and that He is the true God. In fact, she uses the very covenant name of God, *Yahweh*: ***for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.***

Rahab has lived in a pagan culture and I'm sure has seen the worthlessness of their many gods, but now she's come to know that there is One God greater than them all and over them all. He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. She acknowledges His Sovereignty and rulership over all.

- She knew she was on the wrong side of God, but now is ready to be on the right side.

So Rahab is listed in a few New Testament passages that highlight her faith.

Hebrews 11:31, *"By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace."*

She's one of only 2 woman mentioned in the Hebrews Hall of Faith. Sarah is the other one. Sarah gave her body to God to be used as the bearer of the promised child for Abraham, which was Isaac. Yet Rahab gave her body in an impure way, and was used to promote paganism. Sarah and Rahab stand as complete contrasts from a human perspective. But in God's eyes they both exercised a saving faith in Jehovah, the one true God. And God used them both in a great way!

And Rahab is mentioned in the book of James. James the guy who doesn't let anyone off easy even commends the faith of Rahab. But he highlights her faith in action.

James 2:24–26, *"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. ²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? ²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

So Hebrews tells us that she was saved by faith, but then James tells us she's justified by her works. So is it faith or works that was the difference for Rahab? It's a question people wrestle with today, *am I saved just by my faith, or is works necessary?*

It's important to put this in the right order. She was saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone. She was saved by faith, but justified by her works. Authentic faith will be accompanied with authentic works. Faith preceded the works, but works will succeed faith. Salvation produces works, but works will never produce salvation.

- Rahab was not saved because she received the spies; she received the spies because she was saved. And God was using this scouting mission to be a rescue mission for Rahab. We serve a wonderful God who wishes that none would perish! This also shows His wonderful providence.

It's interesting that in these two New Testament passages, Rahab is still identified as a harlot. I think it's a reminder for us that nobody is too far removed from being redeemed through Jesus Christ. This is who she was, but it's not who she will be.

In fact, it's only when she is identified in the lineage of Jesus that the term harlot is detached from her name:

- **Matthew 1:5**, *"Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse,"*
- Not only was Rahab saved by putting her faith in Jehovah God, but she became a forebearer to the Messiah. She is listed in the genealogy of Christ! She may have been condemned in the past, but things sure look different in the light of Christ. And it's by being linked to Jesus that we truly become new creations.

Again, we're not sure when Rahab got saved exactly, but it's a reminder that we are not to dismiss or judge people based on what we see in front of us. We're called to be fishers of men. We're not called to be cleaners of fish, but catchers of fish. Too often we can get caught up in trying to fix people or correct them in all their mistakes. But that's a work that the Lord does through His sanctifying process. He carries out His work through very unlikely means. Let's be careful that we don't dismiss someone thinking that they're not the right kind of people that God can save or use.

Now what I love about all this is seeing how God was working on the west side of the Jordan before the people of Israel even come in. The 10 spies came back with a bad report. They had a fear of the people in the land. But notice, it's the people in the land that had a fear of the people of Israel. Verse 11 says, ***And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you.***

This is when Joshua and Caleb would have loved to yell out, *I told you so!* The people of Israel took 40 years to wander in the wilderness because they didn't believe God could bring them in. Now they're hearing that the people in

Canaan were actually afraid of them. God was already at work in bringing fear to the Canaanites. Their hearts melted. That's some substantial fear!

- God simply wants us to trust Him. Even when we don't see how things are going to work out, believe that He's got it figured out and that He's already at work to bring about His purposes.

2:12-14 - *Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, ¹³ and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.* ¹⁴ So the men answered her, "Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you."

As Rahab has experienced this great mercy of the Lord, she wants the same for her family. She thinks outside of herself. This great mercy we have received from Jesus is meant to be shared with others.

Now this wasn't to go beyond her family. She wasn't to share this info with others because it would put everybody's lives in danger, but now because of what we've received in Jesus, if we don't share this info the lives of lost people around us are in danger.

- May we be active in sharing this good news of Jesus with those around us. Salvation is found in Him alone. As these 2 spies pledged their lives as surety of Rahab's safety, Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22). And He will deal kindly and truly to all that put their faith in Him.

2:15-21 - *Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. ¹⁶ And she said to them, "Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way."* ¹⁷ So the men said to her: "We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, ¹⁸ unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home. ¹⁹ So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. ²⁰ And if you tell this

business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear.”²¹ Then she said, “According to your words, so be it.” And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.

Here we’re introduced to this scarlet cord (vs. 18). It’s a scarlet cord that weaves its way all through Scripture and leads us to Jesus.

- This isn’t a green or yellow cord, it’s scarlet, or crimson red.
- A harlot on this day would paint their window-sills red to identify them (think red light districts today).
- And now this scarlet rope would be lowered out from the window and would form a red cross shape.

What’s really amazing is where this scarlet color originated from. The color is made from the dried body of the coccus ilicis worm.

“The Crimson Worm looks more like a grub than a worm. In the lifecycle of this worm is where the deeper meaning is found. And it points to the work of Jesus on the cross.

When the female crimson worm is ready to lay her eggs, which happens only once in her life, she climbs up a tree or fence and attaches herself to it. With her body attached to the wooden tree, a hard crimson shell forms. It is a shell so hard and so secured to the wood that it can only be removed by tearing apart the body, which would kill the worm.

The female worm lays her eggs under her body, under the protective shell. When the larvae hatch, they remain under the mother’s protective shell so the baby worms can feed on the living body of the mother worm for three days. After three days, the mother worm dies, and her body excretes a crimson or scarlet dye that stains the wood to which she is attached and her baby worms. The baby worms remain crimson-colored for their entire lives. Thereby, they are identified as crimson worms.

On day four, the tail of the mother worm pulls up into her head, forming a heart-shaped body that is no longer crimson but has turned into a snow-white wax that looks like a patch of wool on the tree or fence. It then begins to flake off and drop to the ground looking like snow.

Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”¹

¹ Abbott, S. <https://reasonsforhopejesus.com/psalm-22-crimson-scarlet-worm/>

The Israelites were told to do a similar thing in seeing their lives spared at the Passover. They were to put the blood of a lamb upon their doorposts. This too picturing the work of the cross.

- The scarlet cord weaves its way through Scripture to lead us to Jesus.

These two Israelite spies would be lowered down from this scarlet cord. They would go and hide for three days in the mountains, then return to the other side of the river.

Jesus in like manner would be lowered down from a scarlet stained cross. He would be in hiding for 3 days, but would rise again and emerge on the other side of death. And He's returning again to complete our redemption. Our redemption is sealed now, but will one day be brought to finality.

But here's the deal, we need to remain in Jesus. There is no other place of salvation. It is in Jesus alone.

- Just as Rahab and her family had to remain in the house. Just as Noah and his family had to remain in the ark. Just as Paul said to the crew in the storm, *"unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved"* (Acts 27:31).
- We're tempted to jump ship when pressures come. We think about other options when life gets hard or when answers are few. But Jesus is the only provider of salvation. There's no plan B. Regardless of how hard life can get, Jesus has secured your salvation. So remain steadfast in Him. He's coming again and what He has in store for us will cause our present and temporal pains to be a forgotten memory.

It says in vs 21, ***And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.***

That scarlet cord, this picture of salvation, wasn't going anywhere. Rahab knew this was the only way to be spared from judgment. May that truth be bound in our hearts.

- **John 15:6**, *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."*

2:22-24 - *They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned. The pursuers sought them all along the way, but did not find them.* ²³ So the two men returned, descended from the

mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. ²⁴ And they said to Joshua, “Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us.”

What a great report. Only it was the same report Joshua gave the nation some 40 years prior. Again, if we don't walk by faith, we're destined to wander in the wilderness. Living by faith is an exciting life to live because it's there you see God at work.

Rahab had to exercise great faith and courage in trusting these spies. She had to have faith and courage in telling her family about the coming judgment and the only way to be spared. They could have ratted her out. But her faith took action and she was justified by her works.

Next time we'll move from the faith of an individual to discuss the faith of a nation that will be needed for Israel to enter in.