

Joshua 2:1-16  
Rahab:  
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Every year the Gallup Poll conducts a survey in which they ask American what they believe are the professions with the highest ethical standards. And every year, for the last 15 years, nurses have ended up on the top. 84% of Americans believe that nurses have either high or very high ethical standards. And nurses are followed by Pharmacists, Medical Doctors, Engineers, and Police officers, all of whom had higher than 50% of those polled say they were ethically.

At the bottom however were Advertising practitioners, Insurance Salespeople, Car Salespeople, and at the very bottom...members of congress. Unfortunately clergy fell below 50% as well, 44%. My question is why didn't 6% of you vote for us.

This morning we are going to look at a person who, by virtue of her profession, would have been so marginalized that her job would not even make the list—and if it did, the list itself would be invalidated by her very presence.

Now by way of introduction, let me provide a bit of context. In the year 1440 BC God used a man named Moses to lead the Israelites from Slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea, toward the land of Canaan. This was the Promised Land that God had given to them to be their homeland. Along the way God kept them going with the manna, water from the rock, and helped with the Hebrew Leadership Org Chart, so Moses didn't have so much on his shoulders—including a few who didn't even fit the mold but had that special something called the Holy Spirit, named Eldad and Medad.

When they arrived at the edge of Canaan, the Promised Land, the Lord told Moses to send spies to scout the out land. That didn't go so well, and all but two of the scouts came back saying: "you're crazy, even though this place has everything, there's no way, the people here are huge, their cities are fortified, they will eat us for lunch."

God is not terribly impressed or sympathetic to their worries. Making excuses for why God can't work through us rarely goes well. In Numbers 13 God says: "But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness shall see the land I swore to give their fathers."

But there are two, Joshua and Caleb say "You bet we can take it, because God's with us."

But, as is so often the case fear and anxiety prevail among God's people, so the Lord says: here's the deal, I'm going to give you a little time to think about it out there in the wilderness, about 40 years.

It's all too easy for us to become familiar and friendly with our limitations and small perceptions of God's work in our lives. But all it does is keep us on the periphery of our true calling. Circling the center, but never reaching the center, the very thing God has called us to be.

When God calls us to walk with him in faith, the Promised Land will always reside beyond our strength. But the place beyond our strength and our understanding is precisely the place where the little “g” gods we prop up, fall flat, and where Yahweh reveals his presence in and with us.

Let’s pick up with verse 1 of Joshua 2.

**And 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.**

Question number 1: what are two good Jewish boys doing in the house of a Canaanite Prostitute? Not for the normal reasons one might stay in a place like this, but for the reason that there they might find the greatest cover and secrecy, so they could be off the grid. When Harriet Tubman was transporting slaves through the underground railroad she would often stay in the homes of nefarious businessmen, so as to go unnoticed. Already we’re given a hint as to the gospel message in this passage.

But they are detected, the King finds out.

**And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.”<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.”<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.**

Think about this from Rahab’s perspective, she could have been a national hero, she could have taken a huge stride in cleaning up her own reputation. She might have had a parade in her honor, she could have quit her job, and been looked upon from that moment forward as a Canaanite hero. All she had to do was say, “they’re up there.”

So why does she lay her neck on the line? Because if the authorities find out she’s harboring enemy spies, she’s dead. Let’s look at verse 8 and following:

**She came up to them on the roof<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.**

Everybody in Jericho had heard about what Yahweh had done for the Israelites in leading them out of captivity, and through the Red Sea. How this people had faced off with two mighty superpowers and prevailed. Everybody in Jericho had heard of the God of these people and they were paralyzed with fear. Except for Rahab. Rahab knew that the Lord, Yahweh, Jehovah was THE one true God. She knew that he was the maker of heaven and earth, and that all other gods, the gods of the Canaanites and instead of responding in fear, Rahab responds in faith.

She said I'm going to align myself with this God. Continuing with verse 12:

**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 <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> 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.” Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. <sup>16</sup> And she said<sup>(a)</sup> to them, “Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.”**

Her house happens to be within the city walls, she just happens to have a rope that people can climb down with—can't imagine why. The guys climb down the rope, they go on their way and they are preserved and safe.

**Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they told him all that had happened to them. <sup>24</sup> And they said to Joshua, “Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.”**

Think of the irony of this situation, 40 years ago the Israelites are poised on the edge of Canaan, and they say no way, they're too big. The Israelites are melting with fear because of the Canaanites. 40 years later the Canaanites are melting with fear, because Rahab the prostitute gave them the strategic information they needed to take the city.

Now if you remember how the rest of the story goes Joshua and the Israelites cross the Jordan River and come to the city of Jericho, there they march around it once a day for 6 days, and then on the seventh day they march 7 times, and on the seventh time they all shout and blow their horns and the walls of the city come tumblin' down. And the Israelites march in and take the city, this was the first major conquest of the Israelites in Canaan.

But what happens to Rahab after this happens. Look with me at chapter 6 verse 25.

**But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.**

But the story for Rahab doesn't end there. God didn't just spare Rahab, he said “you're going to be a part of my family, the nation of Israel.”

You know Rahab's will never end up on Gallup's list of trusted professions, but it does, interestingly show up on another list...the one Mark read for us a little earlier. Matthew lists Rahab who became the wife of a guy named Salmon, and together they had a son named Boaz. Who, if you remember became the husband of Ruth, another foreigner, and they are both listed, not only in the genealogy of David, but also in the genealogy of Jesus.

What in the world is Rahab doing as the great great grandmother of Israel's great King David? Why would God include Rahab in this genealogy? Not only is she included in the genealogy but she's named, she's prominent. If you go on ancestry.com and you learn that you've got a scoundrel or a criminal in your family tree, you're going to want to hide that, bury it in the minutia of family lore, right?

God not only does it, he puts Rahab right in the middle of Jesus' family tree. And this is really important for a few different reasons: 1. She was a woman, and women weren't typically listed in Jewish Genealogies. But there they are, 5 women listed in Matthew's listing, and everyone of them has this amazing story of how God worked in their lives, so it was certainly intentional for God to include them.

Second issue for Rahab, she's not Jewish, she's a foreigner. You're not going to include a Canaanite in the line of Royalty, you're definitely not going to include one in the line of the Jewish Messiah.

Lastly, her profession would, in any other case, be a no-go for her to be included, and yet here she is front and center, one of the select few who are passed down through the history of God's people as one of the greats. This is particularly telling since Jewish genealogies often skipped over the people who were, say less than reputable. Between Rahab and David there may have been a few generations of ancestors who were left off for one reason or another, and yet there's Rahab.

So why, why does Matthew include Rahab? Why is Rahab and her family spared in the Israelite conquest of Canaan? Why is someone with such a sordid past given a royal place? I think the answer gets to the heart of our faith, it gets at the heart of what it means to understand that we are children of God.

Now at first glance we might think that the reason Rahab is elevated is for her act of hiding the men Joshua had sent as spies. Yes, Joshua spared her life because she hid the spies, but it doesn't really explain why she is included in the genealogy of Jesus.

If you jump over to the book of Hebrews and look at chapter 11 there is a list of men and women who are people of great faith in the pantheon of God's people. **By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.** Her actions were a result of her faith in the God of Israel, and that's at least part of the reason why she is included.

But I think there is a deeper lesson for us all. Every person in Jesus' family tree, every person who has been brought into God's people Israel by faith is there because God wants them to be there. Rahab did not deserve, no matter how great her act was, a spot in God's family tree. God gave it to her. David is not listed in Jesus' genealogy solely because he was a great king, he was also a murderer and an adulterer. And yet there he is, there because God wanted him. God brings people,

flawed, broken, sometimes despicable people, the famous and the obscure, the nurses and even the members of congress.

The nurse may be at the highest mountain, and the prostitute may be at the bottom of the deepest sea, but neither of them can reach the stars. The only way either of them, and any of us comes to God is by God's gracious hand of invitation that sometimes beckons, and other times drags us kicking and screaming. If God does not come down to us, we are all lost. This is one of Calvin's great theological points that God has graciously condescended to stoop down to us.

None of us is so good that we don't desperately need the Grace of God, and none of us is so bad that we are ever beyond his reach. That's the glory of the grace of God.

Rahab was not on Gallup's list, but she was on Jesus' list. God didn't include Rahab on his list because of what she had done, even though her act of faith was a great testimony to what God had already done in her, she was on God's list because God mercifully and generously wanted to extend grace to her. And he does it for you and me.

Think about this, God had sent out spies 40 years earlier, and they came back with that ominous report. Do you think much had changed in the time between visits from the spies? No. God already knew, God had already made the way for his people to move in and inhabit the land. God acted in this way in bringing the Israelites into the land when they did so that Rahab the foreigner, Rahab the woman, Rahab the prostitute would be shown grace and not wrath. Let this be a message to any among us who finds themselves down because of the burdens of their past. And let this also be a message to those of us who tend to be puffed up in our spiritual pride. There is no corner, no darkness, no past too grim that God cannot fully redeem it.

When the Pharisees were feeling rather spiritually sure of themselves on the matter of Jesus' baptism, Jesus says in Matthew chapter 3: "Listen, **don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.**"

God didn't include Rahab on his list in spite of her profession, but because of it, so that he could remind me, and remind you that he is a God of Grace. And that is what we need more than anything, and what the world needs more than anything. Whether we're at the top or the bottom of Gallup's list, we all need that grace.

And that's why we celebrate communion, to remind ourselves of the gift of infinite grace and infinite mercy that comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ and what he has done for us on the cross. And to remind ourselves that even though, as Paul writes in Romans all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, not only that but Paul goes even further in saying that I don't do the things I want to, and the things I don't want to do, the sins that continue to cling to me I continue to do in open rebellion. Even though this is the honest truth of who we are. The honest truth of who Jesus is, is that while we were yet sinners, the perfect lamb of God, the Messiah, King Jesus emptied himself of all his power and authority and gave himself for us on the cross.

The early church father Athanasius in a short book called *On the Incarnation* famously said: "He became what we are, so that we might become what he is." We believe that by the mysterious and amazing power of the Holy Spirit that is what we become as we gather at this table, we become and

are nourished by the body and blood of Jesus Christ, given to us as the greatest gift of grace we could ever imagine or need.