

2. Faith in the midst of carnality

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It is not an easy thing to have a solid faith in God in any circumstance. Especially when everything is stacked against and you are standing all alone, that is the time when our faith is put to test.

God tests our faith for at least two reasons:

- 1) To show us whether our faith is real or counterfeit.
- 2) To strengthen our faith for the tasks He's set before us. I've noticed in my own life and ministry that God has often put us through the valley of testing before allowing us to reach the mountain peak of victory.

Only two women are personally named in Hebrews 11, "The Hall of Fame of Faith": Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and Rahab, the harlot of Jericho.

Sarah was a godly woman, the wife of the founder of the Hebrew race and became a mother of Isaac at her old age by faith. But Rahab was an ungodly Gentile who worshiped pagan gods and sold her body for money. Humanly speaking, Sarah and Rahab had nothing in common. But from the divine viewpoint, Sarah and Rahab shared the most important thing in life: They both had exercised saving faith in the true and living God.

If that is not impressive for a pagan ungodly woman who became a follower of God, here is more. The Bible associates Rahab with the Messiah Jesus! When we read the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 1, we find Rahab's name listed there, along with Jacob, David and the other famous people in the messianic line. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound according to Romans 5:20.

This evening we are going to be a fly on the wall to listen to the conversation between Rahab and the Israelite spies and get to know about Rahab's courage.

A. TWO SPIES INTO THE ENEMY TERRITORY

Joshua 2:1 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.

In chapter 1, Joshua told all of the Israeli people to prepare for a battle against Jericho people in three days. God has a special purpose for these three days.

Jericho was one of many "city-states" in Canaan, each one ruled by a king. The city covered about eight or nine acres, and there is archeological evidence that double walls about fifteen feet apart protected the city. Rahab's house was on the wall. I guess Rahab was living a hole in the wall.

It was a strategic city in Joshua's plan for conquering Canaan. After taking Jericho, Joshua could then cut straight across and divide the land. Then it would be much easier to defeat the cities in the south and then in the north.

Forty years before, Moses had sent twelve spies into Canaan. Only two of them had given an encouraging report. Joshua sent two men to spy out the land and especially to get information about Jericho. Joshua wanted to know how the citizens were reacting to the arrival of the people of Israel. Since Joshua knew that God had

already given him the land and the people, the sending of the spies wasn't an act of unbelief. A good general wants to learn all he can about the enemy before he goes into battle.

Throughout the history of Christianity, it has embarrassed some Bible scholars that these two spies went to the house of a prostitute. Some have tried to say that Rahab could have been an "innkeeper" according to its Hebrew word, but the Greek word from the Septuagint and Hebrews 11:31 are clear enough. She was a prostitute.

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.

It's remarkable how God in His grace uses people we might think could never become His servants.

1 Corinthians 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

Why did they go to the harlot's house? Though it was an awkward place, it must be admitted that it was a perfect place to hide out and remain anonymous since the city was on strict guard.

B. LYING FOR GOD?

Joshua 2:2-7 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." 4 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.

Rahab took her life in her hands when she welcomed the spies and hid them, but that in itself was evidence of her faith in the Lord. If the king of Jericho discovered her deception, he would have killed her instantly as a traitor.

Since Rahab became a believer at that time, how do we defend her lies? On the one hand, she demonstrated her faith in the Lord by risking her life to protect the spies. But, on the other hand, she acted like any pagan in the city when she lied about her guests. Perhaps we're expecting too much from a new believer whose knowledge of God was adequate for salvation but certainly limited when it came to the practical things of life.

Lying is wrong and the fact that God had Rahab's lies recorded in Scripture is not proof that He approved of them.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.

Rahab's lie is not justified, but it does show courage. Consider that she was a pagan sinner in a city and culture wholly given over to the worship of false gods and immorality, with no previous contact with the Word of God or the things of God. But what would be our excuse?

C. RAHAB'S CONFESSION OF FAITH

Joshua 2:8-14 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. 12 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."

Rahab knew about the Red Sea crossing. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea forty years ago, she was not even born yet. But when she heard about it from somebody and took it its face value.

Faith is like a toothbrush. Everybody should have one and use it regularly, but it isn't safe to use somebody else's.

Faith is not believing in spite of evidence but obeying in spite of consequence. It also means obeying God no matter what we see around us or ahead of us or how we feel within us. Faith doesn't depend on our emotions or our understanding of the situation.

Please note v11. Rahab acknowledged that the God of Israel was far more superior than any gods they had in Jericho and surrounding areas. Her knowledge of the true God was meager, but she acted on what she knew. That is why the Lord saved her.

Faith is only as good as its object. Some people have faith in faith and think that just by believing they can make great things happen. Others have faith in lies, which is not faith at all but superstition. When we have faith in the one true living God, we don't need anything else, because He is our Sustainer, Provider and Protector.

Faith in God demands of us to be obedient to the Lord. It isn't enough to say "Lord, Lord!" We must obey what He tells us to do. Rahab's obedience gave evidence of a changed life. Faith takes God at His Word and follow what He tells us to do.

D. THE SCARLET CORD - THE SIGN OF SALVATION

Joshua 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.

Rahab immediately put her faith into both the identification and safety of the scarlet cord. She also trusted in the ones who made the promise about the scarlet cord.

This scarlet rope would identify the “house of safety” to the army of Israel when they came to take the city. The color of the rope is significant because it reminds us of blood. Just as the blood on the doorposts in Egypt marked a house that the angel of death was to pass over, so the scarlet rope marked a house on the Jericho wall whose occupants the Jewish soldiers were to protect.

Faith in the living God means salvation, and faith in His covenant gives assurance. But faith in the token of the covenant is religious superstition and can provide neither salvation nor assurance. The Jews depended on circumcision to save them, but they ignored the true spiritual meaning of that important rite.

Many people today depend for their salvation on their baptism or their participation in the Lord’s Table – the Eucharist, Communion. But this kind of faith is vain.

Joshua would be a savior for Rahab, but a judge for the rest of Jericho. In the same way Jesus is the Savior for those who trust Him, but He will be judge for those who reject Him.

E. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Joshua 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.”

Let’s face it, guys. The Lord already declared that He would give this land to the Israelites. Then how did this reconnaissance help them with the eventual battle? It didn’t help them at all.

But the main purpose of this spy trip was not for the Israelites immediately. Rather it was to preserve the lineage of the Messiah Jesus Christ through Rahab. It seems that God went out of His way to bring Rahab the harlot and her family to Himself.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Faith is not believing in spite of evidence but obeying in spite of consequence. It also means obeying God no matter what we see around us or ahead of us or how we feel within us.

2) When we have faith in one true living God, we don't need anything else, because He is our Sustainer, Provider and Protector.

3) Faith in God demands of us to be obedient to the Lord.
Faith takes God at His Word and does what He tells us to do.