

Rahab – Woman of the Night

Joshua 2:1-21; Joshua 6:22-25

Have you ever referred to anyone as being from “the wrong side of the tracks”? Have you ever caught yourself looking down your nose at someone? Is there anyone about whom you might say that is not good enough for your son or daughter to marry?

We make value judgements on all sorts of people for all sorts of reasons. We do so, sometimes without ever having spoken to the person. We know nothing about them. They just don't look like 'our kind of people'.

Perhaps you have been pleasantly surprised at least once, by someone you did not hold in very high esteem. They said or did something wonderful, that you would not have expected of them. You judged them unfairly and, as google maps says, had to do some recalculating! Today we are going to have a look at an iconic story from the Bible whose central character is 'one of those people'.

Meet Rahab. She was commonly known as a harlot, or prostitute. A show of hands please for all of you who have close, personal friends who are prostitutes. Remember last week when we studied the story of Ruth and Naomi and I said that in Biblical times, many widows, in order to survive, had to prostitute themselves. They had no other way of earning money or getting food. We treat people a certain way. They respond a certain way. And when they do, we dismiss them, and we look down upon them.

Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, sent two men to do some spying on the walled city of Jericho and the surrounding area. It was part of their plan to destroy the pagan city of Jericho and to take the land. Jericho was a walled city. Perhaps you have been to a walled city. Avignon, France is a walled city. Shops, homes, government offices ... they are all within the walls that served to protect that city. These two men, who were spying on the area, found refuge for the night at the home of Rahab. But as happens in all small towns, news travels fast and it

wasn't long before word got back to the king of Jericho that two Israelite spies were in the neighbourhood!

As soon as he heard this, the king sent two servants to have Rahab turn these two foreigners over to his men. Rahab told the king's servants that indeed two men had come to her home last night, but that they had left before the city gates closed for the night. She told them that she did not know where they had gone, but if they hurried, they would likely catch them. The two servants immediately raced off toward the Jordan River in pursuit of the spies. All the while, the men were hiding under some sheaves of flax on the roof of Rahab's house where she had hidden them.

Before they had fallen to sleep, Rahab went back up onto the roof. She told the spies that she knew the Lord had sent them and that her family lived in fear of the Israelites. They had heard about the parting of the Red Sea, and how the Israelites had destroyed the two kings of the Amorites. "I know that the Lord your God is indeed God in heaven

above and on earth below. I pray that you and your God will deal kindly with me and with my family.”

The two spies assured her that if she would keep their presence in Jericho a secret, that they would make sure that Rahab and her family were dealt with kindly once the Lord gave Israel that land. They had struck a deal!

Rahab’s home was inside the city wall but against the wall itself. She helped the two spies escape by letting them climb down a rope through the window of her house. In order to assure their safety, she told them to go up into the hill country and wait there for 3 days before returning to where they had come from.

The two spies instructed Rahab that, when the day came to invade Jericho, that she was to tie a crimson cord to her window so that they could identify her home. Every member of her family was to remain in her home. As long as she did that, they would be spared! Rahab agreed to the plan.

The two spies headed off into the hills where they remained for 3 days before heading back to the Jordan and their leader, Joshua.

Fast forward to chapter 6. Joshua's army had made their way to the outskirts of Jericho. Joshua instructed his two spies to go to Rahab's home and rescue Rahab and her family before the damage was done.

The two men proceeded, and seeing the red cord, knew immediately which was Rahab's home. They were able to get Rahab and all of her family out in secret and took them to the camp of the Israelites.

The Israelites began to burn and plunder the walled city of Jericho.

They stole anything they could that was of value. Joshua won the battle of Jericho ... and the walls came tumbling down!

So Rahab was a prostitute.

She lied to people from her own community.

Her community was comprised of other corrupt pagans, much like herself.

Why is she now called a hero?

It is odd that a woman like Rahab would not only come to faith, but that she would become known to the world through the Holy Book!

Rahab had heard that the Israelites were God's chosen people. Her mustard seed of faith enabled her to trust in a God she had only ever heard about. Now she was about to experience His grace.

Let's take a moment to think about this woman Rahab. I encourage you to do so with grace, not disgust in your heart.

One of the most looked down upon citizens in Jericho this pagan city, becomes the conduit for God's work to be done.

Think not about Rahab for a moment, but about yourself –

Can you think of anything in your past for which you are ashamed?

Are there any decisions, or words or actions in your past that you would prefer do not become public knowledge?

Is there any sense of 'not being good enough' that lives somewhere inside of you? What does your past sometimes whisper to you? What might Rahab's past have sometimes whispered to her?

In some respect, Rahab might simply have been a shrewd business woman, looking for a good deal for herself and her family. Perhaps Rahab was a broken soul in need of forgiveness and healing – a woman trapped by shame and disrespect ... crippled by the bad decisions she made out of desperation – now wanting to take a different path?

These two men came into her life ... these two spies ... she saves their lives ... she confesses to them that what little she knows about their God, she believes He is powerful ... and that He is God of all things ... in heaven above and on earth below.

The Book of the Bible after Joshua is Judges. The book after Judges is Ruth ... remember Ruth? Listen to this ... "Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side whose name was Boaz." Boaz went on to marry Ruth,

Naomi's daughter-in-law who faithfully returned from Moab to Israel with her. Any guesses on Boaz's mother's name? Rahab!

God re-defined Rahab –

- from fallen woman to chosen woman
- from bad girl to bride
- from mess to mother
- from prostitute to progenitor of the Messiah

Grace ... what an amazing reality. God can use people in spite of themselves ... in spite of bad decisions, in spite of a mean spirit, in spite of a disobedient heart ... grace ... we can't earn it ... and we don't deserve it. Grace can come into our lives at any age, under any circumstances, even when we least expect it.

Sometimes when I do some people watching ... I know I need more grace. I know I have to do better at giving others the benefit of the

doubt. I know I need to cut others some slack. I know I need to offer more grace.

Sometimes when I take a good look at myself, I know I need to do the same ... offer myself more grace, give myself the benefit of the doubt, cut myself some slack. It is after all, what I believe God has done, and God will continue to do.

Amen.