

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO RAHAB

When Grace Runs Red

“A Journey Through James”

Sermon 10

Texts: *James 2:25; Heb 11:31; Joshua 2:8-14; Mat 9:13; Lk. 5:30-31*

James 2:25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the **messengers** and sent them out by another way?

Hebrews 11:31 By faith Rahab the prostitute **did not perish with those who were disobedient,** because she had given a **friendly welcome** to the spies.

Joshua 2:8–14 Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof⁹ 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.** ¹⁰ **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.** ¹¹ 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.** 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** ¹³ **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.**” ¹⁴ 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.**”

Matthew 9:13 Go and learn what this means: **‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.**”

Luke 5:30–32 And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “**Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?**” ³¹ And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² **I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**”

Introduction:

This morning we will be looking at one of the most amazing displays of the grace of God and the power of the gospel to deliver anyone from the just judgment of God upon sin. We will explore the story of how God's grace came to one of the most *unlikely*, *unlovely*, and *undesirable* people in the OT – the town prostitute whose name signified her profession – Rahab.

James has been helping us understand our role in God's mission to the world around us: ***“God is on a mission to redeem and restore fallen people to the image of His Son for the praise of His glory.” (1:18b)***

And to accomplish this mission, God sent a good and perfect gift down from above – ***the Word of Truth*** (1:18a). This Word in its living form is Jesus Christ, God's Son (Heb 1:1-3). But this Word of Truth also has a written form – the Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Spirit of God uses the written Word to open the eyes (2 Cor 6:4) of spiritually blind people and enlivens their heart of spiritually dead people (Eph 2:4-5) so they recognize the truth and are born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the loving and abiding word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

And these people are marked by three important realities: ***1) they have a living faith that is wholehearted, single focused, and fully trusting*** in God and in His Word; ***2) they live by the values and for the goals of God's kingdom*** wherever they are in the little kingdoms of the world; and ***3) they have fully aligned and identified themselves as loyal friends of God*** and not of the world system that is hostile to Christ and to His gospel.

And they hold these realities so strongly they are willing to sacrifice everything in this world (including their own lives) for things they know to be real that God has promised to them in the world to come (Heb 11:1).

James calls these people as “Friends of God” and introduces us to five of them in this epistle (Abraham, Rahab, the Prophets, Job, and Elijah).

Each of these friends of God had to renounce friendship with the world of their day and fully align themselves with God, His purposes, and His people – there was no room for a divided heart or double mindedness (James 1:6-7)! **Abraham** left his entire former way of life in Ur; **Rahab** aligned herself with a foreign nation that was about to destroy her own people and her city; **the prophets** aligned themselves with the Word and Will of God; **Job** aligned himself with God in the darkest, most painful moments of his life; and **Elijah** exhorted a nation that was “limping” and “wandering” between serving the true God and the gods of Jezebel to align themselves fully with God or with Baal (cf. James 5:19) and prayed fire down from heaven as compelling proof.

Each of these friends of God came to a defining moment where they had to declare their personal allegiance to God and stand alone against the world of their day. Each of them endured severe testing and faced strong temptation. And by the enabling grace of God, each of these friends remained true to the whole-hearted, single-focused, fully-trusting faith God planted in their heart and asked them to live out in their lives.

Last week, James introduced us to Abraham to answer the important question, ***“How do I know I have the kind of faith that saves?”*** James points us to two defining moments in Abraham’s life: 1) the moment in Gen 12 where he believed God and God counted righteousness to Abraham on account of his faith; and, 2) the moment in Gen 22 when God put that faith to the test to validate its authenticity and affirm its enduring faithfulness.

But how do we know that our genuine faith will actually save us from the wrath of God on the day He judges the earth for its sin and rebellion against Him?

And to answer that question, James points us to the second of God’s friends – an extremely well-known and proficient Canaanite prostitute whose faith saved her on the day God’s judgment fell and destroyed all the disobedient, rebellious sinners in the city-kingdom of Jericho (Heb 11:31).

So, how did a pagan prostitute escape the righteous wrath of God on the day judgement came to Jericho? Both James and Hebrews tell us that she was delivered on account of her living, authentic faith in God and His Word.

Because Rahab is such a stunning example of what James said earlier in the book – “*Mercy triumphs over Judgment!*” (2:13), her story is worth exploring as we consider *how the grace of God delivered, transformed, and exalted the ultimate outsider into the ultimate insider in God’s kingdom!*

In order to make sure we understand why Rahab’s story is so important, there are several significant pieces of background information we must grasp to fully appreciate why James includes her as one of the five friends of God whose faith and faithfulness we are to imitate.

Background information:

- The story of Rahab is one of the most intriguing stories in the OT – more has been written about her (in Christian and Rabbinic writings) than any other woman in the OT. The Jewish Rabbis were fascinated by her story.
- They ascribe to her stunning beauty as one of the four most beautiful women in the OT (Sarah, Abigail, and Esther being the other three).
- She lived in an ancient, powerful city at the entrance to the land that, four hundred years earlier, God promised to Abraham and his descendants Jericho existed for almost 1000 years before Joshua’s arrival.
- Jericho was famous for its idolatry and immorality – its people revealed in idolatry and immorality to the point that the city filled with the sins God told Abraham He would one day judge (Gen 15:13ff). And at the heart of all this wickedness and immorality was a pagan prostitute named Rahab.
- According to tradition, Rahab was known in her day for her skill at her profession. She ran a brothel on the wall of Jericho where she plied her profession with the men of the city and any who came from afar. Everyone in Jericho, including the king, knew who she was and what she did. Most of the noblemen and even the king may have been involved with her.
- When we meet her in Joshua 2, Rahab was familiar with the words of the inspired song God gave Moses 40 years earlier immediately after he crossed the Red Sea and watched Pharaoh’s entire army perish under the wrath of God for resisting His will and ignoring His warning.

- She was also familiar with the more recent victories God granted Israel when He destroyed two kings and their respective armies for opposing the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land (Og and Sihon – the Amorite kings). In other words, Rahab knew what God had promised His people and she knew that no king or army had been able to stand against them for the forty years since God had delivered them from Egypt (with the exception of the defeat they suffered by the Amalekites and Canaanites due to their rebellion against the word He had given Moses to go up and take the land (Num 14:39ff)).
- Because of her profession, she was well-positioned to know what was going on inside and outside the walls of Jericho. For example, she knew that the men of the city and the surrounding area were so immobilized by terror due to the massive army of Israel camped three days away from the border of Canaan they could not even avail themselves of her services.
- Because she had access to the highest personages in the city, she was in a position where she could have easily carried favor and monetary reward for alerting the King's men to any individuals with intent to do harm – most of them would frequent her brothel for food, lodging, and her services. In other words, Rahab was connected to what was going on and was in position to leverage the information for personal gain or advantage.
- ***If anyone merited the coming wrath of God, surely it was this immoral, idol-worshipping prostitute. Yet, she is the only one who heeded God's warning. And because of her faith, she and all her household were saved and delivered on the day God's wrath fell on Jericho.***
- Rahab was the first gentile convert to Israel (after Moses' father-in-law, Jethro). She was the first of many more to come (Gal 3:8-9).
- Not only was she delivered from God's wrath, Rahab was also elevated to a most honorable standing in Israel – the ancestress of King David.
- So, how did this pagan prostitute become such an honored matriarch in Israel on par with Abraham, Moses, and Joshua?
- Rahab is mentioned five times in the Bible (Joshua 2; 6:17-25; Matt. 1:5; Heb. 11:31; and James 2:25).
- Hebrews tells us ***she was saved because of her living faith*** and James reminds us that ***her faith was living because of the deeds it produced.***

I. Her Sinful Character (James 2:25)

...*Rahab the prostitute*....

- In every Biblical account except one, Rahab is identified by her past occupation as a prostitute.
- Her name has a meaning which implies her occupation.
- Everyone in Jericho and the surrounding cities, including the King knew who she was and what she did to make her living.
- In OT times there were two different kinds of prostitutes: 1) respected and revered religious or temple prostitutes who engaged in sexual behavior as part of the worship of pagan gods; and 2) common, despised prostitutes who provided sexual favors to anyone who was willing to pay for them.
- Rahab was clearly in this second category. In other words, she was well-known for the wrong things. She was at the bottom of the moral and social scale even for a pagan city like Jericho full of ***pervasive spiritual idolatry*** and ***persistent moral depravity*** (which is why the writer of Hebrews describes them as “***disobedient***”).
- Joshua 2 indicates that her home was well situated on the wall of the city near the city gate and most likely functioned as the city brothel.
- The grammar used by James and the writer of Hebrews wants you to see ***her prostitution as more than just activity she engaged in but as her identity and her character*** – this was who Rahab was, not just what she happened to do because of some unfortunate circumstance.
- If you were going to pick the first Gentile to join God’s people and become part of God’s Kingdom, you would never have picked her.
- Which is why what happens when two men show up to spend the night at her “inn” is so unexpected that it is shocking!

II. Her Surprising Conduct (Heb. 11:31)

...*because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.*

- The moment of clarity came when the king’s messengers came to her door seeking to do evil to the messengers God had sent to warn their city of His coming judgment for their sins.

- What will Rahab do? Will she be loyal to her people and to her little kingdom of Jericho or will she be loyal to God and to His plans for His people and for the Kingdom He was giving to them?
- The writer of Hebrews uses a theologically loaded term to describe the way Rahab received the two Hebrew men who had come to announce judgment on Jericho – *she welcomed them with “shalom.”*
- This welcome was more than common courtesy or hospitality toward two visitors who had come seeking food and lodging.
- The term “*shalom*” *indicates that Rahab had made a definitive decision to do no harm to these men* despite the harm that was about to come upon Jericho and its citizens. Clearly something unusual is going on. And to see what exactly is happening, we need to look at the account in Joshua 2:1-7.

A. *She recognized their identity and mission (2:2-3)*

- On the very night of their arrival, the two messengers are immediately recognized as “sons of Israel” and their mission to search out the land is clearly known to powerful individuals in the city who come to Rahab’s brothel and made all of this known to Rahab.

B. *She received them with peace (2:2,4)*

- They “lodged” with her (v.2) and, knowing the danger they were in, she immediately took them in and hid them (v. 4) *prior* to the arrival of the King’s men.

C. *She sided with them and aligned with their mission (2:4-5)*

- The King’s officials knew the men were in Jericho, they knew why they had come, and they knew they had come to Rahab’s brothel – and they came expecting her to deliver the men into their hands as a loyal citizen of the kingdom-city of Jericho.
- But, in a shocking turn of events, Rahab does something totally unexpected – she sides with the two Israelite messengers over and against the King, his men, and her entire city.

- And she demonstrates this by welcoming the two men with shalom and by sending away her fellow-citizens on a wild-goose chase that led them outside the protection of the city gates with a massive enemy army within striking distance.
- Instead of siding with the messengers of her own king and aiding them in doing evil to the two men, Rahab sides with the messengers from God and sides with His people and His kingdom. And she does this in the face of great personal risk to all that she has and at the potential cost of all that she owns.

D. She protected them from her own people (2:6)

- The men had come secretly (2:1) and now Rahab secreted them on her rooftop under a large pile of flax – and she had done so prior to the arrival of the King’s men.
- ***Her actions were intentional, thoughtful, and personal – she had made a massive decision to align herself with God’s people.***

III. Her Stunning Confession (Josh 2:8-11)

*Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof⁹ 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.** ¹⁰ **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.** ¹¹ **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.**”*

- Clearly, Rahab’s surprising actions indicate a major turn had happened in her mind and heart ***so that she turned from the idols and gods of Jericho to embrace the true God of Heaven and earth.***
- And her “turning” was not just a mental change of mind or a convenient turning due to the size and perceived power of Israel’s military might. It was a deeper turning with moral and spiritual implications. ***Another word for what she did is “repentance.”***

- ***She could have easily adopted the mindset*** shared by everyone else in the city – they were confident that the walls of Jericho that had stood for almost 1000 years would withstand any assault from Joshua and his army and so they put their trust in their walls and in their idols – but she turned away (repented) from her idolatrous beliefs.
- ***She could have easily seduced the men*** to gain valuable information that would have brought her status and monetary reward – but she turned away (repented) from her immoral ways. ***But she didn't.***
- And what motivated both her turning from idols to God and her alignment with His people and plans was something she had come to believe with all of her heart about the God of Israel.

A. What she knew (2:9)

“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.

- She knew the identity of Israel’s God as evidenced by her calling Him by His covenant name, Yahweh.
- She knew and embraced the reality that God was fulfilling the covenant He made with Abraham to give his descendants the land where she dwelt (Gen 12:1-3; 15:12-16) and, after 400 years, to judge that land for its idolatry and immorality.
- And she knew that God had sent great terror upon them, and that no inhabitant of the land could successfully stand against Israel.
- Clearly she had come to know the truth about Israel’s God as well as His covenant purposes and plans for the land He had promised to give to His people – from which would eventually flow blessings for all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:3).
- But how had a pagan prostitute come to know all of this?

B. How she knew what she knew (Joshua 2:10)

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.

- Clearly, Rahab had heard about God, but she obviously had heard more than just His name – she heard about His marvelous deeds.

- BUT she had also heard His Word – the inspired word recorded in Exodus 15 that God had given to Moses some 40 years earlier.
- She quotes language from this inspired text in her statement to the two messengers.
- For 40 years as Israel wandered in the Wilderness, the word from God to them and about them had wandered throughout the nations that lived in the land God was about to give His people.
- They heard how He had drowned the greatest, mightiest military force in the world of that day in the Red Sea. And they had heard how God had helped Israel totally destroy two Amorite kings who opposed them on their way to the land of the Canaanites.
- She knew what she knew because she heard what she heard – and what she heard was the Word of the Living God!
- **BUT there was another way she heard** – just like He sent messengers to warn Sodom and later, Jonah to warn Nineveh, God sent two messengers to warn Jericho about the judgment about to come upon them.
- *And when that Word from those messengers came to her, God opened her eyes and enlivened her heart so that she saw the truth about God, about His people, and about His purposes – and she believed and embraced that truth personally!*
- This is an OT example of “*Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the Word of God.*” (Rom 10:17).

C. What she believed in her heart and confessed with her mouth

*for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.
(Josh 2:11)*

- She believed and confessed that the God of Israel is the One and only true God and that the gods of Canaan were not just powerless idols, ***they did not exist at all.***
- She acknowledged the sovereignty of God to do what pleased Him with His creation and His creatures – ***including her country/city.***
- She turned to Him for safety from His promised coming judgment.

- ***In other words, Rahab turned from her idols to serve the living and true God while she waited for the coming of His servant Joshua to rescue her from the coming judgment.***

IV. Her Bold Appeal (Josh 2:12-14)

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 ¹³ 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."

- She entered into a ***formal covenant relationship*** with God and His people – *"Now please swear to me by the Lord."*
- Based on her faith in God, in His Word, and in His Warning that death and destruction were indeed coming – *"that you will save alive ... and deliver our lives from death."*
- Based on her personal alignment with God against her gods and with His people against her kingdom and people – *"by the Lord."*
- Based on her loyal kindness to two messengers from a nation and a God she did not know – *"as I have dealt kindly (loyally) with you."*

V. Her Faithful Faith (Josh 2:14, 18-21)

¹⁴ *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.**" ...¹⁸ Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. ¹⁹ Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. ²⁰ But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear." ²¹ **And she said, "According to your words, so be it."** Then she sent them away, and they departed. **And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.***

- So, what did Rahab’s faith look like in action after she helped the messengers escape while she waited for Joshua and the coming judgment? Did her faith preserve and endure? Did it resist the temptation to return to her old allegiance with the King and renew her old alliances with the men of Jericho? Or was her faith faithful?
- Was her faith a faith of convenience only or was it born out of deep, enduring conviction?
- She trusted the Lord and faithfully obeyed the words of the messengers she had come to believe.
- She persevered in her new faith and remained true to her covenant with the men of Israel and with their God Who was now her own!
- She waited with confident expectation (*the word for scarlet “thread” has a meaning associated closely with the concept of confident “hope”*). The scarlet thread was marking more than her location, it was declaring her confidence that Joshua would keep the covenant she had made.
- But would her faith deliver her when God’s judgment fell and flattened the massive walls of the fortress-city of Jericho?

VI. Her Gracious Salvation (Heb 11:31; Josh 6:22-25)

- She believed the messengers who had been sent to warn Jericho like the Ninevites believed Jonah when he was sent to warn them. And because of her faith, on the day judgment fell, Rahab and her family were rescued and delivered.

A. *She was redeemed in spite of her wicked past (Heb 11:31a)*

Rahab the prostitute

B. *She was rescued by her faith (Heb 11:31)*

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient.

C. *She was rewarded for her faith (Josh 6:22-25)*

But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, “Go into the prostitute’s house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.”²³ So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel.²⁴ And they burned the

city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. 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.

VII. Her Glorious Standing (Matthew 1:5-6, 16)

⁵ and Salmon the father of **Boaz by Rahab**, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of **David** the king. ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom **Jesus** was born, **who is called Christ**.

- She was brought out of Jericho and ritually cleansed and purified (Josh 2:23): *So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. **And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel.***
- She was made a member of God's people and given a part in God's kingdom (Josh 2.25): **And she has lived in Israel to this day.**
- She was highly exalted and honored by God in the eyes of all men for all time because she was chosen by God Himself to give birth to the mightiest and most glorious men in Israel's history – Boaz, David, and Messiah himself (Matt 1:5-6)!

Conclusion: So, what do we do with a story like this?

A. We Worship in Awesome Wonder at the Majesty of God's Grace.

B. We Rejoice at the Beauty of God's Mercy

C. We Marvel at the Transformative Power of God's Mercy that truly has triumphed over His judgment!

D. We take our own place at Rahab's side and appeal to God for the same mercy and commit to cultivate and display the same faithful faith she displayed while she waited for Joshua during the time we wait for the coming of someone greater than Joshua – Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Luke 19:9-14, Jesus told the story of two men who went to the temple to pray: a well-respected, religious Pharisee and a despised and rejected Publican (tax collector). For all practical purposes, in Jesus' day to be a publican was as bad if not worse as being the city prostitute.

The Pharisee, familiar with the law and known for his holiness and his religion before men, lifted his hands and his face to heaven and prayed, "*YHWH, I am so thankful I am not like these other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers or even like this publican! I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all I get.*" But the despised tax-collector was standing some distance away and due to his own sense of unworthiness could not even lift his head but beat his breast and cried out in desperation, "*YHWH, be merciful to me! A sinner!*"

And Jesus had an observation not just about which man's prayers were heard. He had an observation about which one of the two men was truly justified and really God's friend – and it wasn't the Pharisee!

You and I might immediately dismiss this story and inherently distance ourselves from one of the two men in the story – the Pharisee. But I actually have a different question for you: Do you personally take your place as the publican? OR – while you reject the idea that you are the Pharisee – do you actually think like him?

Last week we had about 15 women come to sing and celebrate the glorious, marvelous gospel grace that delivered them from some of the most vile and morally offensive sins a person can commit. And while we sat there and rejoiced in their story – did we at some point think, "thank God I am not like them?" Or did we truly take our place next to them and sing for joy that God's mercy was extended to us whose hearts are just as sinful and morally offensive to God as any of the sins God forgave in the lives of any of those women?

Until we do, we will continue to be moral sinners with a gospel that saves us from respectable sins as we continue on our comfortable way in a faith that is powerless to change us and very possibly lifeless and useless to deliver us from the coming wrath of God.