

In the Line of the King: Rahab
Joshua 2, 6; Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25
ABC 12/3/17

Very few of us would ever hang our dirty laundry on the front door of our homes, but that's exactly what the Holy Spirit had Matthew do as he opens the NT. Matthew begins the NT with the genealogy of Jesus & includes 5 women, 4 of whom many would want kept out of sight. This Advent we're looking at these 4 women who form part of the royal genealogy of Jesus & demonstrate how God's magnificent grace knows no limits. Last week we saw God's grace with Tamar. Today we come to Rahab. Before we go any further, let's play a little game. I'll give you a Bible character & you tell me their occupation.

David – shepherd, king
 Nehemiah – cupbearer
 Peter – fisherman
 Herod – king
 Esther – queen
 Matthew – tax collector
 Lydia – seller of purple cloth
 Rahab – harlot!

Rahab is mentioned 8 times by name in Scripture. 6 times her occupation is given. It seems that God wants us to think *harlot* or *prostitute* when we think about Rahab. We'll come back to that later. **Mt 1:1-5** PRAY

A quick review of history: Judah & his brothers sold Joseph into slavery & he ended up in Egypt. Eventually, his brothers joined him there but the Israelites became slaves in Egypt for 400 years. God raised up Moses & miraculously rescued or delivered His chosen people from Egypt. But because of their faithlessness, they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Moses dies, Joshua takes over. They are now ready to take possession of the land God had promised them & Jericho was the 1st target. Remember the story? The song tells us, *Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho*, but who really fought that battle? God did (Josh 6:2). Joshua & the Israelites just had to obey what He told them to do. They marched around the city once a day for 6 days. On the 7th they marched around it 7 times & what happened? The walls came down, right? But one section of the wall remained standing. The section with Rahab's house on it. Let's read **Joshua 2**.

1. Rahab's Past As I said, Rahab is identified as a harlot numerous times. Some commentators & scholars try to tone this down & say she was an inn-keeper, but that's not what Scripture says. She was a Canaanite prostitute. Whereas Tamar pretended to be a harlot, Rahab was one. Which raises the question: why were these 2 spies at Rahab's? & before that, why did Joshua send them anyway? God had already told him they'd attack & conquer it (Josh 1:2-3). So why were they sent? The only reason I can see is because God sovereignly was searching out a particular woman named Rahab to be saved. It appears the spies were unaware they'd been spotted as spies & went to the one place in the city where 2 men who were foreigners could go & remain anonymous, *Rahab's House of Ill Repute*. Where else could they have gone & not have to answer a lot of questions? More than likely, they met her in the street where she could have been practicing her trade or perhaps, hearing of them, she was out looking for them as though she were drumming up customers as was the custom of a harlot (Prov 7:6-23). Somehow she'd come to believe that Israel's God was the true God, but living in this totally decadent culture, it's unlikely she had more knowledge of God than we see here. Rahab may have recognized the men as strangers, & because the whole city was on alert to the possibility of spies, & because of her convictions about the God of Israel, she may have concluded they were Israelites & invited them into her house for protection & to express her faith.

Rahab wonderfully illustrates God's sovereign grace. He is no respecter of persons. He accepts & forgives us not because of what we are or might be, but because of His Son, because of what He would do & now has done & will do through those who trust Him & act in faith. It doesn't matter what we were or have been. What matters is who Jesus Christ is, what He has done, & whether or not we put our trust in Him. This also points to God's sovereign control over the affairs of men & how He directs the steps of those who rest in His provision or are looking to know Him better. God had worked in Rahab's heart, He knew her faith & her longing to know God, so God sovereignly worked & brought the spies & Rahab together for their protection & her blessing. Of course, God could have made the spies invisible or smote the people with blindness or used angels, but He chose to use 2 men & one woman walking by faith with courage to act on their

convictions & the more normal circumstances of life. By God's providence this woman becomes one of the sparkling diamonds in the crown of God's grace. She's a perfect illustration of God using ordinary people in extraordinary ways. Rahab's past was a sinful pagan harlot.

2. Rahab's Present It's interesting that all of Jericho knows of God & what He's doing with the Israelites. All but one hear the reports of God & it moves them to rebellion. Rahab was a wise woman who acted in light of proper information. She hears & it moves her to faith. The king of Jericho raised his fists at God while the harlot's heart was being drawn to God. **9**

The reports of God's power that they'd been hearing for 40 years had their knees knocking. The inhabitants of the land were terror stricken. 3x in this chapter, the word **melted** is used to describe the emotional condition or the morale of the people (9, 11, 24). Mentally & emotionally, they were a defeated people. God had already given the people of Jericho into the Israelites' hands. This had been the case for how long? Since they had heard about the events of the Red sea (2:9-11). Things have changed in 40 years. Remember when Moses sent the 12 spies into the Promised Land? How did 10 of them report back? *They are giants & we're only grasshoppers* (Num 13). The roles have reversed, haven't they? The Canaanites hearts had now **melted** in fear of the Israelites & their God. But one Canaanite responded in faith instead of fear. Rahab hears the same stories about the Israelites & their God as the rest of Jericho, but her heart melts in faith, not fear. I think it's a tremendous sign of faith that the Israelites had seen the power of God firsthand & Rahab had only heard of it, & yet she believed. Her faith was strong.

The spies, who are never named, gave Rahab a promise & also some conditions. The 1st was that Rahab was supposed to tie a scarlet cord in the window. The spies said to Rahab, in vs 18, **when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window**. Rahab was supposed to tie the cord when they came into the land, but immediately, when they leave, she ties the scarlet cord to her window (21). She wasn't taking any chances, she was going to get that thing out there! The 2nd condition was that she was to keep the plan an absolute secret, except from her family & their households (17-20).

Also note that Rahab acts in faith with very little information. The spies said, *Rahab, you just tie a scarlet cord in your window & you'll be saved.* How many of you would like more information than that, especially when the walls begin to shake; especially when the Israelites are walking around the city? Rahab had to have constantly checked the scarlet cord & yet thought, *Is the scarlet cord out there? Yes, but it really going to save me?* An entire city was headed for destruction. On top of the city wall was one lonely house with a red piece of cord waving in the wind. That cord was an outward sign of the inner work of grace that God had brought to pass in Rahab's life. I also think of the spies who, all of the sudden, didn't have the answers either. They return & report, *That house on top of the wall, that's the one we have to save.* Joshua says, *But God's plan is for the wall to come tumbling down.* Now we have a problem, unless we believe another miracle took place, which I can easily believe. If I can believe that God caused the wall to tumble, then I can believe He allowed one section to remain standing. It would be the section that supported Rahab's house. Perhaps, for most of us, faith creates problems because we don't have all of the answers. Rahab, however, hung the cord & waited. Even though she had a shady past, God used her. Her past failure didn't forfeit the potential for future success for Rahab.

As we read, Rahab & her family were saved from destruction. Although they must have grieved for lost friends, they had to celebrate that they were spared because of Rahab. **6:25**

Beyond the events of Jericho, Rahab isn't mentioned again in the OT. Other than stating **she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day**, the OT gives no indication of Rahab's fate. The Jewish genealogies mention the family into which she married, but they never mention her. The only direct indication of her inclusion in the royal line comes in Mt 1.

3. Rahab's Promotion Rahab never could have known how her decision to aid the Israelite spies would impact the future of the world. God took this formerly pagan woman & inserted her directly into the genealogy of His Son. In Mt 1:5 we find the beautiful fact that she became part of the Messianic line! A prince, named Salmon would marry her. I don't know, but I like to think he was one of the 2 spies who lodged with her. I believe he was impressed with her faith in a God she'd only learned about from afar. & it was the original 2 spies who were the ones who

personally retrieved Rahab & her family from Jericho (6:22). They would have a son (a descendant, genealogies were often condensed), named Boaz. Boaz would grow up & find a wife in the same kind of unorthodox way that Tamar had. He found his wife gleaning in the fields. Her name was Ruth. Rahab the pagan harlot became the ancestor of Jesse, the great-great-grandmother of King David, the ancestor of Joseph the carpenter, who, along with Mary, would raise the Messiah, Jesus Christ. How does a person with such a sordid past end up in the line of Israel's royal family? The answer is the grace of God. Rahab never could have imagined her decision to help the Israelite spies would impact the future of the world. God took this pagan prostitute & inserted her directly into the genealogy of His beloved Son. What a trophy of God's grace Rahab is. She is a lady with a very shady past, who is now a member of the King's family. For the last 6,000 years God has taken great delight in transforming lives. He loves to display His glory by manifesting His grace in the least likely of candidates, people like Tamar & Rahab & you & me. Not only is Rahab placed in Jesus' genealogy as a respected mother of Israel on the very 1st page of the NT, but she's also promoted in status as an icon of faith. The book of Hebrews places her alongside other spiritual giants. There are only 2 women mentioned in this Hall of Faith & Rahab is one. Who's the other? Sarah. Go figure. Why those 2? Because God said so!

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace (11:30-31).

Rahab chose God & His people over everything she had known & God blessed & saved her. Faith always aligns itself with God & His people. Faith causes us to shift our alliances. No longer are we alive with the world & with our former way of living. We are now alive with God & with His people & with a new way of life.

The book of James associates her with what may be the greatest example of faith in the OT Scriptures: Abraham's willingness to sacrifice to God his son Isaac. **In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers & sent them out by another way? (Jas 2:25).** How could James say she was justified by works? Hang with me, we'll get there later.

Faith is our willingness to forget the failure of our past & risk everything about our future as we obey God. Griffith Thomas, an expositor, pastor & author, in the early 1900's, wrote a commentary on Hebs, & said that faith is convinced...

that God exists;
 that God is able;
 that God is ever present;
 that God can perform what He wills;
 that God has proven Himself & will yet prove Himself faithful again.

He wrote that, like David of old, every believer has 5 small pebbles to use; they are: God is, God has, God does, God can, & God will.¹ Little pebbles work really well in the hands of little, ordinary, common, run-of-the-mill people. & God can make the giants fall & the water part & the walls fall & sinners turn in faith. & God receives all the credit.

So why does the Bible continually refer to Rahab as **the harlot**? God often reminds us of former lifestyles that have become living trophies of God's grace & power. In 1 Cor Paul talks about the list of sinners. & then he says, **Such were some of you...** (6:11). Did they need to be reminded of their past? Evidently, they did. & evidently, there's something to the fact of remembering where God brought us from that is beneficial. When the Bible mentions Rahab in Josh 6:17 & 25, Js 2:25, & Heb 11:31, it is **Rahab the harlot**. Is that fair? God has it here for us. He included her former occupation long after the fact, so He could let us know that, regardless of the past, regardless of the former lifestyle, God can bring someone who mirrors His grace in an absolutely marvelous way out of it. Imagine the joy of the apostle Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15), when he wrote that God...

chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy & blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (Eph 1:4-6).

We should rejoice over this transforming grace in our lives every day!

Including Rahab in Jesus' genealogy & in the halls of the faithful reminds us that it's faith that pleases God. He embraces it wherever He finds it:

¹ *Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary*, p 154

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), & raised us up with Him, & seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:4–7).

God takes great delight redeeming people, no matter what their circumstances or their past. What better time to celebrate the exceeding riches of His grace than at Advent, when we anticipate & celebrate the arrival of Rahab's greater Son, our Savior, Jesus.

There are some obvious lessons from this passage as it's a wonderful exhibit of God's grace:

1. This story demonstrates God's concern & work to deliver one person or one family who will trust Him (2 Pt 3:9). It reminds us God knows the hearts of people & will lead us to them if we're only available.
2. It demonstrates God's protection & provision of His servants to enable them to carry out their calling & purpose regardless of the circumstances. The only thing that can hinder us in doing the will of God & fulfilling our calling is our own unbelief.
3. It demonstrates how our faith should lead to action & ministry to & for others. Rahab reached out to both the spies & to her household (Jn 1:35-51; 4:28-29, 39).
4. It demonstrates how God's mercy & grace overcomes His wrath through the cross.² Rahab was an unlikely candidate for salvation. From a Jewish perspective, Rahab had 3 strikes against her: she was a woman, an Amorite, & a harlot. Even though Rahab was an unlikely candidate for salvation, God's grace had reached down to her. The fact that she is called **Rahab the harlot**, even after her conversion, underscores God's abundant grace toward sinners. The spies didn't know when they went there that God had a mission for them besides spying, but He did. Sometimes we go somewhere on some errand, but God has another purpose, to use us to lead to salvation someone whom we would call an unlikely candidate.
5. Rahab forms a type & a pledge of God's purpose to save the Gentiles who, though without hope in the world (Eph 2:12), could to come to God & be a partaker with Israel through faith in Christ. Rahab's faith brought her into covenant with God & His people. James Boice points out

2 J. Hampton Keathley, III, <https://bible.org/print/book/export/html/295>

that Rahab actually became more Jewish than many of the Jews by birth, in that she believed God, whereas they did not.³ Matthew Henry comments, *A true believer is desirous, not only to be in covenant with God, but in communion with the people of God, & is willing to cast in his lot with them, & to fare as they fare.*⁴ Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ (Mt 1:5-6) includes the surprising fact that **Rahab the harlot** became an ancestor of Jesus Christ! What a great testimony of God's abundant grace!

6. Rahab's faith saved her from perishing. God commanded Israel to kill everyone in Jericho. Modern critics, who think they're wiser than God, say that God was cruel to order the extermination of everyone in Canaan. But God had given the Canaanites 400 years to fill up the measure of their sin (Gen 15:13-16). For 40 years, they had heard how God delivered Israel from Egypt through the Red Sea. For several years, they had heard how God had defeated the Amorite kings, Sihon & Og, on the other side of the Jordan. For 7 days, they'd watched Israel march around their city. But did they repent of their sins? Only Rahab did, & perhaps her family. Rahab herself could have complained that God was unfair to judge her city. She no doubt lost many friends in the conquest. But instead, she knew she deserved death for her evil lifestyle. She knew that the Lord, God of Israel, is **God in heaven above & on earth beneath** (Josh 2:11). Although the entire city trembled with fear of the impending attack, their fear didn't lead to repentance & faith. Rahab's fear led her to turn from her sin & to believe in God. By faith, she **did not perish along with those who were disobedient** (Heb 11:31). Rahab had probably come to faith in God before the spies arrived at her house. When God providentially brought the spies to her house, she saw it as the means of deliverance for herself & for her family. Although she didn't understand much theology, she had enough faith in the one true God to save her. Her past life of sin didn't disqualify her from salvation. God delights to save notorious sinners for His glory!

7. Rahab's faith separated her from her disobedient countrymen. Those who perished are called **disobedient** (Heb 11:31). They weren't basically *good people*. They'd heard of God's power, but they refused to submit to Him. They thought their walled city would protect them. To be saved,

³ *Joshua: We Will Serve the Lord*, p 45

⁴ *Commentary*, VI:950

Rahab had to break away from her people, her culture, & her source of income. Although that's never easy & she must have wrestled with her decision, by faith she made the break. We aren't told whether she warned her fellow citizens of the coming judgment, or whether they mocked her for holing up in her house while Israel's armies strangely marched around the town. But it's still true today: saving faith means making a distinct break from this evil world, so that we often stand out as weird in their eyes.

8. Rahab's faith was an obedient faith. Js 2:25 lists Rahab next to Abraham as one who was justified by works. James isn't denying justification by faith alone, but rather is making the point that genuine faith always results in good works. Don't misread James words here. He's not contradicting Paul. Rahab's faith led her to hide the spies & send them away secretly, even though it put her life at great risk. She had to obey the explicit instructions that the spies gave her, to put the scarlet rope in her window & to have all of her family inside the house with her, in order for them to be saved. It may have seemed silly to them to watch Israel marching silently around the city 13x. They may have been tempted to join others on the wall shouting insults to the troops below. But they obeyed & they were saved. Granted, Rahab's faith wasn't perfect in obedience. She was a pagan woman from a pagan culture, & it was a difficult situation when the king's messengers came to her house looking for the 2 spies, so she lied. But God was gracious to take Rahab's obedient faith as seen in her welcoming the spies. If you will come to Christ in faith, just as you are, He saves you & then begins to work His holiness, your sanctification, in your life.

9. Rahab's faith probably resulted in the salvation of her pagan family. We don't know for certain, but I think it's probable. But we do know that they were saved physically from destruction at Jericho, & they became a part of the people of God. Presumably they not only learned about the true God of Israel, but also came to believe in Him personally. God can use the salvation of an unlikely person, like Rahab, to reach an entire family through her faith.

10. Rahab's faith changed her life from futility to fruitfulness. God reclaims the lives of the worst of sinners who turn to Him in repentance & faith. Rahab married & became a mother &

grandmother. She became a partaker of all of Israel's spiritual privileges & even became linked to Christ Himself! Any life outside of Christ is futile & headed for eternal destruction. Any life that God saves by His grace through faith becomes fruitful & headed for eternal glory.⁵

The genealogy of Jesus Christ is immeasurably more than a list of ancient names; it is even more than a list of Jesus' human ancestors. It's a beautiful testimony to God's grace & to the ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Friend of sinners, who **did not come to call the righteous, but sinners** (Mt 9:13). If He's called sinners by grace to be His forefathers, should we be surprised when He calls them by grace to be His descendants? King Jesus is truly the King of grace! The grace of God reaches out to Rahab the harlot & completely changes her life & brings her into all the privileges of the sons & daughters of the Most High.

You may be sitting here this morning & you think that what your life has been & what you have done puts you beyond the reach of the grace of God in the Gospel. If that's the case, you have no idea how powerful that grace is, & it is simply received by faith in Christ. Do you have a checkered past? I doubt it was any more tainted than Rahab's. Let me encourage you to leave your reputation in the hands of God & go about your business of living for Him. Yes, look at Rahab's past. But look at her future as well. She is rescued after the walls fall down. It isn't long before a godly Israelite man named Salmon meets her & is so moved by where she'd been & how she'd believed & what she risked, he says, *This is the woman I've been waiting for to be my wife.* He marries a Gentile woman who left her past nation of idolaters behind & trusted by faith in the God of Israel. By faith, Rahab shows us that absolutely anyone can receive the blessings which are purchased for us in Jesus Christ. Christ came to redeem for Himself a bride from every tongue, tribe & nation. Yes, look at your past but with gratitude look to your future. & in the meantime, remember your weakness doesn't hamper God's power; & your past doesn't hinder God's plans. & faith demonstrated through unlikely, sinful people is simply the willingness to forget the failure of our past & risk everything about our future as we walk with our faithful Lord.

Our Lord & our God, we bow before You today & we thank You for Your Word. We ask that You would apply it to our hearts & lives. We pray that You would grant us, by the Holy Spirit, to

⁵ Steven Cole, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-42-faith-conquer-and-convert-hebrews-1130-31-joshua-28-14-62-5-22-25>

believe to the very end, to the saving of our souls & to the glory of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Men come for communion

Why did the spies have Rahab hang a scarlet cord? Some say it represents her occupation. It's her *red light* in the window & therefore wouldn't arouse suspicion. That may or may not be true, but it certainly represented an agreement between 2 parties. In the chaos of the coming battle, a scarlet cord would be easily seen by the attacking army. But there's a deeper symbolism at work here. The scarlet cord reminds us of the blood of the Passover. The color was no coincidence. It was a scarlet cord that guaranteed her deliverance from otherwise certain death. The scarlet cord is a symbol that's often used when speaking of how Christ is hidden in the OT, woven into the familiar stories, hinted at in symbols & types & shadows. The whole Bible, both Old & NTs together, speaks of Christ. From the 1st promise of a coming Messiah in Gen 3:15 to the Passover Lamb & the Manna from heaven, & the rock smitten to provide water for the people of Israel, to the bronze serpent on the pole, to the sign of Jonah in the depths for 3 days; Jesus is there, until He appears in the NT in fulfillment of the prophecies of the OT. He is the Scarlet Cord that saves those who believe what He says. We must be **in Christ** to be safe from judgment. Rahab's story is much like the deliverance experienced in the last plague God brought on Pharaoh & Egypt when He killed the firstborn in every household, but spared the Israelites because of the blood of the Passover lamb which had been sprinkled on the doorposts & the lintel of their houses. Though it has not been identified as such, it seems Rahab's scarlet thread was a picture of Christ.

In the days of Noah, there was safety & refuge for those who entered into the door of the ark. In Egypt there was safety & refuge for those who were gathered behind the doors that were sprinkled with the blood of the Passover lamb. For you & me, there is safety & refuge from eternal judgment, but only if we enter through the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ alone.

Jesus' death, His blood redeems us. There was a price against us we couldn't pay, but the blood of Jesus redeemed us. 1 Pt 1:18-19 says, **knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things... but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished & spotless, the blood of Christ.**

His cross brings us into fellowship with God. According to Eph 2:13, **But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** Without the scarlet blood of Christ we have no way to God.

His atoning sacrifice makes peace with God. By nature we're at war with God; & we can only come to God on His terms, Christ's blood atonement. The Bible says in Col 1:20, **to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross...**

His broken body & shed blood cleanses. Not only does it remove the punishment of sin, it removes the pollution. I don't care what sin you've committed; **the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin** (1 Jn 1:7).

His death defeats the devil. It's the blood that Satan fears. Rev 12:11 says, **& they overcame him (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb.** The devil doesn't want you to learn about Christ's sacrifice because he hates it!

Before this planet was ever put into place, God had determined in His heart that He would send His Son to die upon the cross. How wonderful it is to trace the scarlet thread of the blood of Christ woven throughout the Bible! How much more wonderful to experience its redemption personally. Praise God for the blood of His Lamb!

Pray Pass

Jesus' death on our behalf is pictured in the bread & the cup of communion. He said, **This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me** (1 Cor 11:24).

The cup, representing Jesus' blood, His death, was for us. The scarlet cord of redemption is seen in the cup. Jesus said, **This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me** (25).