



## **BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: A Hope-Filled Christmas**

**By Pastor Bryan Clark**

**Message Title: The Prostitute: Rahab Pt. 2**

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Verse 8:

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and she said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. 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 utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” So, the men said to her, “Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.” Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. She said to them, “Go to the hill country so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days, until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way.” The men said to her, “We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father’s household. It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear.” She said, “According to your words, so be it.” So, she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window. (\*NASB, Joshua 2:8-21)

So, Rahab lives on the wall. One of the interesting things the archaeologists have found, is evidence that because these two walls were so close in proximity—about fifteen feet apart—that it was believed at certain places around the wall, they would put planks from one wall to the other, and then they would put a little shack on top of those planks, and people actually lived on

the wall. It appears that's how Rahab lived. So, she gets this rope, and she lets them down, and they have this discussion about the conditions under which they will keep or not keep the agreement. What's interesting, when you read through the dialogue, you get into this scarlet cord—basically a red rope—and when you start to read through the discussion, it sounds very Passover-ish. Go back and read the text talking about the Passover and the Hebrew people in Egypt, and the final plague, and that the Angel of Death is going to come over, and the responsibility to take blood of an animal and paint it on the doorframe, and that would identify that you were under the blood of the Lamb, and the Angel of Death would pass over. But there's a lot of this similar language. "You go into the streets and you will die, and you don't paint the blood and you will die." And clearly the intent of the text is to draw some imagery from the Passover. It's not blood on the doorpost, but rather it's this red rope that will hang in the window of her house, that still has this symbolism of the blood. You get this sense, that the text is saying, that her faith is going to put her under the blood of the Lamb, and she will experience God's salvation.

Now a logical question would be, "What about the rest of these people? How come they don't have the option of God's salvation?" And the answer is: for four hundred twenty years, they have been warned. It goes all the way back to the days of Abraham, where they have been warned over, and over, and over again, that the God of the Hebrews is God. They've all heard the stories, the same as Rahab. It's just that there's one among them, who has made the choice to believe that the Hebrew God is God, and she will experience the salvation that comes under the blood of the Lamb. I think that's the symbolism there.

So, with that, there is agreement. The spies get away and the remainder of the chapter is just the spies going back, relaying the story and, "Let's take these guys". At that point, Rahab, for the most part, goes away. The following chapters are filled with excitement, and steps of faith, and the parting of the Jordan River, and then you get to Chapter 6. If you're not familiar with the story, the strategy to take the city is really quite unique. A lot of people believe that Joshua was a military genius, but, in this particular campaign, Joshua's genius was not at play. God stepped in and said, "Here's how we're going to do this. Every day for six days, you're going to march up to the city; you're going to march around the walls, and then you're going to go home. And on the seventh day you're going to march around the city seven times, and you're going to blow a trumpet, and you're going to yell, and the walls are going to fall down, and you're going to take the city." The reason God did that, clearly was to say, "We're going to take this city, not on the basis of our strength, not on the basis of strategy, but on the basis of My power delivering the city to you." So that's the strategy. We're caught up in the battle, and they're marching, and it's all starting to get pretty exciting. In the back of our minds, however, we're still thinking, "Hey, what about this prostitute that was promised salvation?"

Well we finally find her in Verse 17 of Chapter 6:

The city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to the LORD; only Rahab the harlot (notice the label never goes away) and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.

Verse 21 says they utterly destroyed the city. Verse 22:

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the harlot's house and bring the woman and all she has out of there as you have sworn to her." So, the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel. They burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron, they put in the treasury of the house of the LORD. However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. (Vs. 22-25)

Fulfilling the promise, they had made; now, most believe the reason that they were put outside the camp was because they would have to go through a purification ritual before they could be invited into the camp. I don't think it implies that it was necessary for them to stay outside. It's just in wartime they were placed there. But I find myself wondering, when Joshua said to the two spies, "Go get the prostitute," and they placed her outside the camp, can you imagine that, at any moment in time, they had the slightest indication of the scandalous thing God would do with this prostitute? And the answer is, "Obviously not". For the most part Rahab goes away and disappears into the story, until we find her in Matthew, Chapter 1.

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In the genealogy of Jesus, it was very unusual in an ancient genealogy to list women...very unusual. In the genealogy of Jesus, there are four women listed, other than Mary. And can you believe it, the second scandalous woman showing up in the kingly line of the Messiah, is none other than Rahab the prostitute. Not only did they invite her into the camp of Israel, not only did they allow her to stay, but she found a man; she married him; she produced a child and, through that child, would come the kingly line of the Messiah Himself. If you had that story in your family tree, that's a story that you would like to keep hidden. Again, we ask the question—it's so unusual that any women are listed in the genealogy—why would you actually advertise that one of these women had been this pagan, idolatrous prostitute? —unless that's the point! That is the reason why God would become flesh—to seek and to save those who have been used, abused, and discarded, those who have been tossed into the trash heap of life, those who have had their dreams abused and crushed. And the reality is: we all find ourselves on the trash heap of life, desperately in need of a Savior. These scandalous women are in the family tree of Jesus to remind us, "This is the point!" God's ways are not our ways, as God extends His grace and mercy to those in desperate need of a Savior.

Rahab shows up two other places. In Hebrews, Chapter 11—a lot of people refer to this as the Faith Hall of Fame—it's a remarkable chapter and there are only two women in the Hall of Fame. One is Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Guess who number 2 is? Rahab! And when you read the text, she's not Rahab—she's Rahab the prostitute. The label never goes away.

The other writer in the New Testament that uses her is James, in James, Chapter 2. When he's talking about faith and works and he talks about, "A faith that saves is a faith that works," of all the remarkable women in the Old Testament that he could have used to illustrate this point, who do you think he uses? Rahab! But it's not just Rahab—it's Rahab the prostitute. There's this constant emphasis on the reality that God took this woman who was so scandalous and made her into this hero of faith. As a matter of fact, the thing about Rahab that is continually emphasized is her courage and faith: that in that moment, when the spies entered into her city, she could no longer remain neutral. She had heard the stories of the Hebrew God. She had grown up in a culture of pagan idolatry and she had to make a decision. Was the God of the Hebrews, God, or is it true what I've been taught my whole life? At this point, she could not remain neutral. That's the point of the Joshua 2 story. She had to make a decision, at a great risk. At the risk of her very life, she took her stand and she said, "I believe the God of the Hebrews is God." That decision not only saved her life, but put her in a position to be a woman whom God would use to change the world.

In the United States of America, we consider ourselves to be very "Christian-ly." People embrace Easter; people embrace Christmas. If you lay out the basics of the message of the Gospel, people for the most part give some sort of assent. But we tend to view that message from a distance. In other words, there's kind of a mental assent, "I think that's true". But that mental assent has no life-changing power, has no salvation power. It takes far more than just mentally saying, "I think that's probably true," and then living my own life my own way, by my own rules, doing my own thing. To truly experience this life-changing power, this life-changing grace, this scandalous grace and mercy that God so freely offers, one must do more than just give mental assent. There must come a point in time where I must say, "I believe that; I really believe that. I'm going to risk my entire eternity on my belief that this is true." Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Nobody comes to the Father but by Me." At the end of the day, everybody has to decide, did Jesus tell the truth or is He a liar? If all roads lead to God, then Jesus is a liar—or Jesus tells the truth. But you can't have it both ways. You can't keep riding some sort of a neutral stance. There has to come a moment in time where you make up your mind. To not decide is to decide. And when you stand before your Maker, you're going to find that out.

God grants you, in His grace and mercy, a gift—a gift of His salvation—to come under the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb is God Himself, who became flesh and shed His blood, in order to pay for your sin; if you're willing to believe, "I am a sinner in need of a Savior"; and I'm going to take my stand; and I'm going to say, "I believe! I believe Jesus died for me!" not from a distance, but to own it, to embrace it, to take my stand; and to say, "I am going to now be a Christ-follower. This is how I'm going to live my life." Some of you would resonate with the words: "Life has killed the dream I dreamed." You get up in the morning and you wonder what happened, "At one time, I had a dream and I thought life was going to be this, but I woke up one morning and I found out life had killed my dream." And now you survive day after day after day. God offers you a new dream—a new dream that is forever—a new dream that's filled with grace and mercy and love, a dream that's filled with

everything you've ever wanted and longed for. But you can't embrace this dream from a distance. At some time, you have to have the courage to say, "Hey, I'm in!" You have to pull the trigger; you have to believe. You have to take your stand and say, "Jesus, I believe, and I want You to be my Savior." The grace of God is so unimaginably scandalous, that who knows, God may actually want to use you to change the world.

Our Father, we're thankful for Your scandalous grace. Lord, there are probably quite a few people that would say life has killed the dream. They get up in the morning and they wonder just exactly what happened. Lord, I pray that You would open up their hearts to hear that You offer them a new dream—not for a day or a week, but forever. And it's a gift! Lord, I pray that they would have the courage to believe. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Arnie: Rahab carried through on her promise and that was a pretty dangerous thing to do, wasn't it? I mean, your life depended on it.

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely. It was total life and death. If Israel lost, she was dead.

Arnie: So, she wasn't just saying she believed; she was acting on that belief.

Bryan: Yeah, it's James Chapter Two. As a matter of fact, James uses Rahab as an illustration of faith and works. She believed and she acted on that belief.

Cara: Rahab made a choice for herself and her family having no idea that God would put her family in the line of Christ. So, I think it's really exciting. It makes you wonder how God might use us on down the line, if we just trust him.

Bryan: Yeah. So, one of the things, you know, we're readers, but for Rahab in the moment, none of that could have made sense. And I think that's often the case. You just can't figure much of this out. All we can do is be faithful one day at a time and the rest is up to God.

Arnie: So, on the one hand, Bryan, you have this story of strong faith, redemption and all of that, yet throughout the Bible, Rahab carries the label of a harlot. Why is that?

Bryan: Yeah, it is very interesting that in the New Testament, so like in James Chapter Two, and Hebrews 11, she retains the label, Rahab the harlot. Part of it is probably for identification, but part of it is just the reminder that God is for everyone, and faith means we just have to believe God tells the truth.

Arnie: So that was to make a point, but in reality, when we're saved, our old labels come off.

Bryan: Yeah. So new identity in Christ, new labels of who we are in Christ, but it's also true that part of our witness is our story, that is clear about who we were, and our need for a Savior. And often it's the messes that God uses, to communicate to others that there's still hope in the Gospel.

Cara: I think it's important too to point out that man still may label you, but you're a new creation.

Bryan: Yup. The one opinion at the end of the day [Right.] is the opinion that matters. Yep.

Arnie: So, is it bad if you're a Christ follower to describe yourself as a spiritual loser in the past? Is that so wrong?

Bryan: So, we typically remind people we were sinners, misfits, and losers, [Right, right.] who have been made right by the power of Jesus. So, I do have a new identity. That's not how I view myself anymore, but that's certainly who I once was.

Cara: So, we know that Rahab was accepted by the Israelites because she was allowed to marry and have children.

Bryan: Yeah. What exactly that looked like is hard to know. I'm going to guess it probably wasn't easy, but she was accepted in, and God used her in a significant way.

Cara: Well, later in the New Testament, Rahab is actually applauded as a woman of great faith and that's a huge life change. But Rahab didn't make the change on her own.

Bryan: Right. So, I think it'd be fair to say Rahab believed and God did the rest.

Arnie: So, Rahab probably wouldn't fit well into one of these Christmas letters you send out to let everyone know how perfect your family is.

Bryan: Exactly, the famous Christmas letters. You know, it's interesting how many ways we reinforce a performance-based value system. And Christmas letters are certainly one of those. But think of Matthew Chapter One as being God's Christmas letter. [Hmm.] And Rahab's there. And she believed and God did the rest. And that's God's way of saying, no matter who you are, Merry Christmas.