

Rahab and the Spies - Joshua 2

Before a battle or conquest it is important to know key things about the enemy and the enemy's land. So intelligence gathering from behind enemy lines is important. It enables battle plans to be made. Sometimes spies are helped by double agents or others from the enemy side who give them information. I don't know whether you're into '007' or spy thrillers, you know the type of thing. And of course those who go behind enemy lines to gather information can be admired for bravery because of what would happen to them if caught. In today's reading, the Israelites sent two spies into the land they were about to enter, and these spies were helped by a citizen from the enemy's side.

The Israelites were a few miles to the east of the River Jordan. The forthcoming campaign was to be extremely important. It would no less be their entering the land promised to them by God back in Genesis (chapters 12, 15 and 17). But Joshua, Israel's leader now that Moses had died, knew he needed information on the enemy and the land before they entered it. So he sent in the two spies.

Look down with me at v1. Joshua said to the spies, "Go, look over the land, especially Jericho." Why "*especially* Jericho"? Jericho was the first main strategic stronghold they were going to come across after they've crossed the Jordan. And it was an apparently a particularly tough and impregnable stronghold.

When the Israelite spies came to Jericho, they entered the house of Rahab, who was a prostitute. There is no suggestion in the Bible that there was any sexual relationship or desire between Rahab and the spies. Rahab's house may possibly have been used as a kind of inn, which would have been a logical place for the spies to stay and to gather information. Like in a local pub they'd be a number of local people there, maybe in a fortress city like Jericho, some military people.

Rahab welcomed the spies and gave them lodging. And this led to her and her family being spared from the destruction she knew was coming to Jericho.

It may be easy to think she welcomed the spies merely as an expedient way out of an inevitable death when the Israelites attacked. But the Bible commends her welcoming the spies as an example of genuine faith in God.

Her faith is commended twice in the New Testament. The book of James (Ch 2v25-26) says her deed showed her faith was genuine. And the book of Hebrews (Ch 11v31) includes her in a list of Old Testament heroes of faith because she was not killed with the disobedient. And she's mentioned a third time: Matthew's Gospel lists her in the human genealogy of Jesus. So we'll see 3 things about Rahab's faith, that it resulted in a good deed, that it resulted in her rescue, and that it was surprising. Then lastly, we'll note the spies' report brought courage.

First, Rahab's faith resulted in a good deed

Well, the spies' attempt to stay under cover was unsuccessful! V2 says the king of Jericho was told of the presence of the spies. Maybe someone in the inn recognised they were Israelites. So, in v3, the king sent a message to Rahab to hand the spies over. But vs4-7 record that she lied to the men the king sent by telling them the spies had already left the city

and that the king's men could track them down and capture them as they returned towards the Jordan river. But she was hiding the spies on the roof of her house!

Rahab's lie is a difficult question raised by this passage. It may be she faced a dilemma, if we think about it. Either she could tell the truth which would have almost certainly would have resulted in the spies' execution, or she should tell the lie to protect the spies. She acted on the higher moral command to save life over the lower command to not lie.

But it seems there was something more than this moral dilemma for Rahab. Rahab was a non-Jew, and so was outside God's special Old Testament people Israel. But she had come to have a faith in Israel's God. And her faith in God resulted in her becoming part of God's people. The book of Joshua later confirms in Ch 6 (vs17 & 25) that, when Jericho was destroyed, Rahab was not only saved but included in God's people. She felt a new allegiance to them – and so she naturally wanted to help them in their warfare, and this for her meant the good deed of giving lodging to the Israelite spies.

What's this mean for us? In the New Testament, those throughout the world and in any nation or race, who trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour are God's family. So, when we first turn to Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we become part of God's family, the church. This inevitably leads to us wanting to be with them, to do good deeds helping them practically and working with them, using whatever skills we have, in God's work, which is the spreading of the good news about Jesus.

The Bible is clear that Christians are to do good deeds where we can for all those in need we come across, but as the early church leader Paul says in Galatians 6v10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

So Rahab's faith in God led to a new allegiance to His people. So she protected their spies. Rahab's faith resulted in a good deed.

The second thing about Rahab's faith is that it resulted in her rescue.

Rahab had heard of what God did to rescue His people from their enemies, and of His calamitous judgement on their enemies. See vs9-11.

She'd heard about what God had done by rescuing the Israelites through the Red Sea, and that two kings east of the Jordan and their armies who had attacked the Israelites were destroyed. (See Numbers 21:21-35). And the population of Jericho knew this too, as v11 says all the people were afraid – their hearts sank and their courage failed.

Imagine the fear in a town or village in Syria or northern Iraq hearing of what IS were doing when they took over a place, and when they heard they were in the text town down the road. The people of Jericho were experiencing a fear like that. But probably even worse – they had heard of God's power and might, and that he was working for His people and against their enemies.

But Rahab had true faith. She expresses her faith in v11 – look down at this verse with me: she said she knew Israel's God is God of heaven above and earth below. Therefore she must have realised, because God is the only true and living God, Jericho, despite all its

fortifications, stood no chance fighting against Him. There was to be slaughter. Complete destruction.

So she cast herself upon God's mercy. *You see, true faith is always more than mere knowledge about God and His power. It seeks His mercy, his undeserved kindness and forgiveness.* Rahab knew she needed mercy in the judgement. In v12&13 she sought it by asking the spies to show her kindness, mercy, by sparing her and her family's lives when the Israelites attack Jericho. The spies agreed. If she gathered her family into the house and tied a scarlet cord outside her window in the city wall the Israelites would spare her and her family.

So Rahab and her family were to escape the catastrophe about to fall on Jericho, which was God's judgement on the people of that city. We'll hear more about why God would do that later in the series. What we need to know today is that Rahab wanted to be with God, not against Him. So Rahab and her family were to be rescued when judgement came to Jericho.

We too face a judgement. That will be when Jesus returns to judge each one of us and to bring the complete victory over God's enemies won by His death and resurrection. The world as we know it now will be destroyed and God's new creation brought in. The disobedient, that is those who do not turn to Christ as Lord and Saviour in obedience and faith, will suffer eternal punishment (Matt 25v41, John 3v36). But those who trusted in Christ as their Lord and Saviour have found mercy and will be saved from God's wrath (Rom 5v9) and instead enjoy eternal life (John 3v16, 5v24) in God's new creation.

Think a bit more for a moment about Rahab's faith. When she asked the spies to show her and her family kindness by sparing them, imagine the trust she had to place in them. She placed the scarlet chord outside her home, but I think it would have been difficult for her not to have experienced moments of doubts or nervousness about what might happen. How will it all work out? Will the Israelites keep their promise? Will the spies be able to convince Joshua and the Israelite commanders to spare her? But she had faith.

But don't we have better promises written in the Bible to reassure us! For example: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3v16), and Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." (John 5v24). And this is possible because Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross bore and took away all God's wrath from those who believe, so they'll be saved from God's wrath. (1 Corinthians 5v7, Romans 3v25, 5v9). What reassurance and hope we have in Christ!

So we've seen so far, Rahab's faith resulted in a deed, and her faith resulted in her rescue.

Now more briefly, we see Rahab's faith was surprising

What do I mean by this? Rahab, someone who was a pagan Gentile prostitute is included in the human genealogy of Jesus Himself. How surprising! Jews despised Gentiles as being far away from God.

What are the lessons for us here? Two I think. First, no-one is too distant to be reached by God's mercy and love, even those we might feel are 'unlikely'.

And secondly, for us when we may feel distant from God. Perhaps because we're going through a tough time, or maybe because of something we've done or said we particularly regret we feel God couldn't possibly love and receive us. But Jesus' death on the cross dealt with *all* our sins once and for all, so we can be forgiven, opening the way for us into God's presence and love. We need to continue trusting in Jesus.

Forth, lastly: the spies report brought courage

Do you recall last week Dan showing us from Joshua Ch 1 that God encouraged Joshua to be strong and courageous because God is with him?

In v1 of our chapter, Joshua sent spies to look over the land. In the last verse of the chapter (v24) we see their report. Look down at that with me. "They (the spies) said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us." ". They reported back what Rahab had told them. The fear of the people of Jericho was proof God was at work for the Israelites. God would fulfil His promise to give them the land. Jericho seemed very hard and resistant with all its apparently impenetrable walls and fortifications. But the people inside those walls were crumbling with fear! So the spies' report brought courage that the Israelites could take the land. This courage is proved by the first verse of chapter 3 which says the Israelites moved to camp at the Jordan ready to cross it into the promised land.

And let's think about the role Rahab had in enabling God's promise to be fulfilled. It was because she hid the spies from the king of Jericho that they were able to bring to Joshua the report that gave courage that the Israelites could take the land. Rahab was a non-Jew, a pagan, and a prostitute far away from God. So never think that our background before we believed is too disqualifying, or that our faith is too weak, or our knowledge of the Bible too little, or whatever, that we cannot be used significantly in God's purposes in the world today. So that little help we give in the church, the hospitality we showed someone, or that little bit of encouragement from God's word we give to someone: we might not know God could use such a good deed in fulfilling His plans for the spread of the gospel.

The spies' report gave courage. How different from 40 years before when Moses sent 12 spies into the land and 10 of the 12 came back with a negative report and Israel believed the negative report and thus rebelled. Now, 40 years later, a new generation had arisen that would be faithful and trust God's promises.

The promises of God can bring us courage and strengthen us: personally, His promises of sure eternal hope for all those who trust in Christ. And also His promises to be at work in others, maybe in ways we cannot yet see, as we pray and share the good news about Jesus, even when things are tough and there's opposition or unresponsiveness. And the promise that Jesus, our great and victorious, strong and courageous Leader, will totally implement His victory when He returns.

Let's pray