

Faith in Action - Joshua 2:1-14
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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I. INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE

These were troubling times in the city of palm trees. Wars and rumors of wars were rampant and widespread reports of nearby nations being utterly defeated by the hand of God were coming in from all directions. Wild talk about the coming judgment of God through a powerful enemy was commonplace. And this wasn't something new. This had been the pressing concern of many a whispered conversation for at least 40 years now, ever since word of an astounding defeat of the nation of Egypt by an unruly group of slaves had spread through the land like wildfire.

According to many independent reports, the very hand of God had freed this large group of slaves from Egypt with 10 miraculous signs that culminated with the mysterious and sudden death of every firstborn son of the Egyptians, including even Pharaoh's own son. Then, as if that wasn't enough, when the Egyptians tried to pursue the slaves, the hand of God rose up again and dried up a path through the Red Sea for the slaves to walk through. When the Egyptians tried to follow the same path through the sea, the waters of judgment closed in on them and literally buried them alive. There was no other plausible explanation for what had happened than the hand of the one true God. That was 40 years ago, but none could forget those amazing reports of what happened in Egypt and none could help but wonder what God was planning to do with these slaves now. Rumors were being spread everywhere that these slaves believed God was leading them to take possession of the land of Canaan as their own, meaning the city of palm trees, the walled and fortified city of Jericho, was sure to be their first target.

And to make matters worse, just recently this multitude of freed slaves had utterly defeated the two powerful kings of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan River, another victory that everyone was attributing to the hand of God. These were indeed troubling times in Jericho, situated only a few miles from where this group of slaves, known as the Israelites, were now in control and no

doubt planning an imminent invasion of the land of Canaan. The city was on lock-down at night, guards were posted at all entry points, and everyone was living on edge and expecting the worst.

No one was likely more connected with this troubling news from the outside world than a prostitute named Rahab. Living and working in common stopping place for travelers, she would have been well acquainted with reports of what was happening with the Israelites and any speculation on what they might do next. Rahab had also come to her own conclusions about the meaning of these events and whether or not the hand of the one true God was really involved. So when the day came that 2 spies from the nation of Israel arrived on her doorstep, Rahab's mind was likely already made up about what she was going to do.

II. THE PROTECTION OF THE SPIES (vs. 1-7)

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Joshua, where we'll pick up this historical account of Rahab's interactions with 2 young men of the Israelites who, in obedience to the command of Joshua, had come to spy out the city of Jericho in preparation for an imminent invasion. Let's begin by reading verses 1 through 7 of Joshua chapter 2:

Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. 2 It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." 3 And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." 4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 "It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." 6 But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. 7 So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.

It doesn't sound like Rahab had to spend much time thinking about what to do, did she? Her mind appears to have already been made up when the 2 spies arrived and she took immediate action. God's providence was definitely at work here because the spies had not managed to enter the city unnoticed. Already it had been reported to the king of Jericho that 2 Israelites had entered the city and were staying with Rahab. Apparently the king knew exactly what their purpose was and it wouldn't have taken much brain power to figure that out. The king and the people of Jericho knew they were the next bullseye for the Israelites and the guards did their job well in not allowing the spies to slip into the city unnoticed.

From the text we notice that when the king's messengers arrived at Rahab's house, it was after dark and Rahab had already cleverly hidden the 2 men in stalks of flax that she was storing in orderly fashion on the roof of her house. For those of you who don't know what flax is, I learned in the *ESV Study Bible* that it's "the plant from which linen is made by a process of alternatively drying and soaking the flax fibers. The flat rooftops of houses were convenient places for drying the stalks." Rahab had a great hiding place for the men and she wasted no time in using it.

Additionally, Rahab protected the spies from discovery by telling 4 lies to the king's messengers:

- 1) She said she didn't know where the men were from;
- 2) She claimed they had already left the city;
- 3) She said she didn't know where they had gone;
- 4) She sent them on a "wild goose" chase, telling them they could catch the men if they left NOW!

That 4th lie was particularly clever since it would have discouraged the king's men from spending too much time searching the house or checking Rahab's story.

So, we can conclude from this passage of Scripture that lying is OK sometimes as long as it accomplishes God's purposes, right? Some have even used this passage to conclude that "the end justifies the means." In other words, as long as what we're trying to accomplish is good, we can disregard a few of God's principles along the way. But let's not be quite so hasty to jump to such a conclusion based

on this passage. Remember, this is simply a historical account of something that really happened, and if you've read much of the Old Testament you've hopefully realized by now that God's people sometimes did some pretty terrible things and made some very serious mistakes...and that just because something is recorded in the Bible doesn't mean it's an example for us to follow. The Bible is really good at telling us what really happened and including both the good and the bad. Whereas most historical documents created by other nations focused on reporting only the good things about their country and their leaders...glamorizing and exaggerating their accomplishments and ignoring their failures...the Bible reports the good, the bad and the ugly...more evidence that the Bible really is true and the very Word of God. There's no other book like it!

And if you'll notice in the verses we just read, the text doesn't come to any conclusions about whether or not it was right or wrong for Rahab to tell lies in order to protect the spies. What we do know from other passages of Scripture is that God never lies (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) and that he commands us not to lie. One place where he does this is Colossians chapter 3, verses 9-10:

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him...

Clearly lying here is associated with the ways of our old self, and elsewhere in Scripture Satan is described as the father of lies. Romans 3, verses 7 through 8, also seem to comment on whether or not it's OK to lie in order to accomplish God's purposes...that age-old question of whether the ends justify the means. Listen to this:

7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? 8 And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

Clearly the ends do not justify the means. We don't do evil in order to accomplish God's purposes. Of course there are complicated questions of what's appropriate in warfare situations, or when you're protecting the life of another person from being exterminated by an unjust regime (for instance, the Holocaust), or when

you're fulfilling God's mission in a place where it's been outlawed (for instance, smuggling Bibles). But these situations are way out of the norm for most of us, and we'll have to make those decision carefully with the Lord if we ever face them. What is clear is that as God's children we are to be like him and live in truthfulness and honesty, trusting in him to take care of us as we're honest and walk in his ways.

What I think we can safely conclude from these first 7 verses of Joshua, chapter 2, is that God always accomplishes his purposes in the world, and in his mysterious ways he somehow accomplishes those purposes through the free-will actions of human beings, some of which actions are good and some of which are sinful. God doesn't do the sin or force people to do the sin, but he is still able to accomplish his purposes through it all. Additionally, Rahab's lies here were in a strange way an expression of her new-found faith in the one true God whose character and ways she didn't yet understand. Interestingly, the 2 New Testament passages that comment on what Rahab did here in Joshua chapter 2 do not commend her for lying but rather for welcoming the spies and protecting them.

III. RAHAB'S BELIEF IN GOD (vs. 8-11)

So let's get back to our account of what happened after Rahab hid the spies and sent the king's messengers on a "wild goose" chase. Let's read verses 8 through 16:

8 Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, 9 and 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. 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 utterly destroyed. 11 "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.

So, after the king's messengers had believed Rahab's lies and went on their way, and before the spies had lain down for the night, Rahab went up to the roof to

have a life-changing conversation with the men. Keep in mind the incredible risk Rahab is taking for both herself and her family by hiding the spies, lying to the king's men and then having the conversation she's about to have with the 2 men. Everything she's doing here would be considered high treason against the king and punishable by death! I'd say there must be something profound that's happening within Rahab that's causing her to take such bold and risky actions.

Well, as Rahab opens up a conversation with the 2 men, she begins by revealing 3 important facts. First of all, Rahab tells them that she herself personally knows that the Lord has given the land of Canaan to the Israelites. This is the conclusion she has reached through hearing about the Israelites and the miracles that were done among them in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the land of the Amorites. Rahab is giving here a clear expression of her personal belief in the one true God: ***"I know that the Lord has given you the land."*** Interestingly, Rahab uses the Jewish name for the one true God, "Yahweh," which she later specifies as "Yahweh, your God," and states that ***"He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."*** In other words, Rahab has come to the unmistakable conclusion that Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, is the one true God who rules over the entire universe and she is confessing her personal belief in him to the two spies. Something profound had happened within her through the working of God.

Secondly, Rahab gives the two men some welcome information about how the people in Jericho are feeling about the Israelites. She describes them as living in terror of the Israelites. Great fear had fallen on both Rahab and the other people living in Jericho and they were all terrified of what was going to happen. Thirdly, Rahab goes even further to tell the men that all the inhabitants of the land had melted away before them. This seems to encompass more than just the people of Jericho, but also all the people dwelling in the land of Canaan as a whole. Rahab, in her connection with travelers coming and going through Jericho, had observed that a great terror of the Israelites and a melting away before them was widespread in the land.

Rahab goes on to tell the men why everyone is feeling this way toward the Israelites, and she gives 2 reasons. First, they had all heard about the Red Sea crossing which had happened 40 years earlier, how Yahweh had dried up a path through the water and allowed them to walk through on dry land. What other explanation could there be for such a miracle other than the hand of the one true

God? This event had not gone unnoticed by the surrounding nations and it seems that all the people in the land were very familiar with the story and had come to their own conclusions about what it meant for them and for the Israelites.

The second and more recent reason Rahab gives for the great terror and melting away before the Israelites, was their recent commanding victory over the 2 powerful kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og. Forty years ago, the Israelites were far away in the land of Midian, but now they were on the edge of the land of Canaan fresh off a major and unlikely victory over the Amorites. It appeared that Yahweh, their God, was still on their side and fighting their battles, and those living in the land of Canaan were next on his list. There was good reason for the great terror and melting away in the land! And Rahab goes on to say that when they heard these things, “our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you.” What a great confidence-builder this must have been for the 2 spies. I’d say these were some pretty helpful insights to have about the mental state of your enemies! God was graciously providing the Israelites with some more faith-building materials prior to their entry into the land.

But I want you to notice as well, in the last part of verse 11, what all the people in the land had concluded from what they’d heard and seen about the Red Sea crossing and the defeat of the Amorites. We know this is not just Rahab’s conclusion because she describes it using plural words: “when WE heard it...OUR hearts melted...no courage remained in ANY man.” And why did they ALL feel this way? Rahab gives us the reason in the last part of verse 11: **“for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”** This is the reason for the great terror and melting away of all people in the land. They had all concluded that the God of the Israelites is the one true God and they knew in their hearts they were on the wrong side of the coming battle. They believed in the one true God, but it was not a belief that would save them. And this was because, as we’ll see as we continue through Joshua, they didn’t surrender and align themselves with the one true God, but instead chose to resist him and take their chances fighting against him.

This is really, really important to remember and keep in mind as you study the Old Testament in general, as you consider the coming wrath and judgment still to come as recorded in the book of Revelation, and as you watch God’s judgment and wrath unfold on the inhabitants of the land of Canaan as God’s people enter

the promised land. Scripture teaches us a lot about what's called "the day of the Lord," a day when the time allowed for repentance and faith is over and all that remains is the swift and powerful judgment and wrath of God against all those who have not repented and trusted in him.

This "day of the Lord" has been recorded as taking place at various times throughout history, some big examples being Noah's flood, the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the clearing of the land of Canaan for the Israelites, and the exile of the nation of Israel to Babylon. Smaller scale "days of the Lord" have also taken place at various times throughout history. But in each of these cases, there arrived a day when it was too late for repentance and all that remained was the pouring out of God's wrath and judgment on his enemies, men, women and children alike. And yet, prior to every "day of the Lord," there had always been numerous opportunities for repentance and many warnings given before that terrible day arrived.

And the same is true for the world today. We're in a time period of history when God is calling out to all people to accept his offer of salvation only available through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He's offering every person on the face of the earth the opportunity to experience forgiveness and restored relationship with him through Jesus, escaping his coming wrath and judgment and the eternal hell to follow for all those who have not come to new life through Christ. Listen to what Scripture tells us in 1 Timothy 2, verses 3 to 6, about our great God and his desire to save us from that awful "day of the Lord" to come:

3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and rose from the dead to offer you new life and forgiveness, a restored relationship with your Creator and a way to escape the coming day of the Lord. Please be absolutely sure you've accepted his free gift by **repenting of your sin, expressing your belief that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead, and inviting Jesus to be your personal Savior and the Lord of your life.** Until you do that, you have no

relationship with God whether you think you do or not, and you're still under the wrath of God and subject to the coming final "day of the Lord" when God's offer of salvation through Christ is withdrawn and all that remains is wrath and judgment for those who are not in Christ.

But let's never forget that both with us today and with the people dwelling in the land of Canaan, God is always gracious to provide abundant evidence of who he is and he gives opportunities for repentance and saving faith prior to the day of his wrath and judgment. Let's not waste the opportunities we have and make the mistake of most people in the land of Canaan, who recognized the one true God, but decided to fight against him instead of aligning themselves with him. In that fatal decision, they subjected themselves to the coming wrath and judgment of God, which we'll see unfold as we continue studying the book of Joshua.

IV. RAHAB'S SAVING FAITH IN GOD (vs. 12-14)

There was one resident of the land of Canaan, however, who went beyond just knowing who the one true God is, to actually taking the path he offered for experiencing his salvation and deliverance. This person, of course, was our friend, Rahab. She had already expressed her belief in the one true God in verses 8 and 11 and taken actions to align herself with him, but in verses 12 and 13 we see her going even further beyond mere intellectual belief to a surrendering of herself to God at great risk to both herself and her family.

Listen to how she goes beyond the intellectual belief of the other inhabitants of Canaan to align herself with the one true God and his purposes no matter what may come:

12 "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, 13 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." 14 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."

Rahab cast herself and her family on the mercy of God and these men and offered as evidence of her sincerity what she had already done for them in hiding them, protecting them and offering them valuable information about the mental state of the enemy. The reality of her faith in God had been shown to be true by the actions she had taken in response to it. Rahab had gone beyond just expressing her belief that their God was the one true God, to actually aligning herself with the one true God and his people, though it could cost her life and lives of her family members. She recognized this as her only path to deliverance and salvation. Her faith and the actions that flowed out of it give us a great example of saving faith and the effects it always has in our lives.

Look for a moment with me to the New Testament book of James, chapter 2, verses 20 to 26. In these verses James actually uses the example of Rahab to show us what saving faith looks like. He begins with Abraham and then moves on to Rahab. James says this:

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James' is not saying here that we are saved by works. What he's saying is that both Abraham and Rahab illustrate for us a very important principle about saving faith, and that is: **If a person truly has saving faith there will be evidence in his or her life and actions.** They will begin changing and becoming more and more like Christ as they pursue him, get to know him through his Word, and begin putting it into practice.

Abraham showed his saving faith in God by obeying him even when what he was being asked to do seemed too hard and didn't make any sense to him. Rahab's

saving faith, in contrast to the intellectual belief of the people around her, caused her to take very risky actions in order to align herself with the one true God and further his purposes. Looking back at Joshua, chapter 2, we see Rahab's personal expression of faith in the one true God in verse 9, and then the actions that flowed out of that true faith in verses 4, 6, 12 to 13, and then 15 to 16 and 21 which we'll look at next week.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So what does this all mean for us today? Well, many people in the world today would say they believe in Jesus. They might even believe that he's the Savior and that the Bible is true. They may even attend church and try to be a good and nice person. But the real questions that each of us needs to ask ourselves are these:

- 1) Have I surrendered to Jesus and invited him to be my Savior and your Lord, both the One who saves me and the One who directs every moment of my life?
- 2) Have I aligned myself with him no matter the cost and am I surrendered to him and pursuing his purposes in my life?
- 3) Do I see evidence in my life and actions that show God is changing me and making me more like Christ over time?

As we're told in 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5, we should test ourselves to see if we're really in the faith. Because if there's one thing we want to be sure of in life, it's this!

If you've gone beyond just intellectual belief in God to real saving faith through Jesus Christ, you will begin to see some evidence in how you live your life over time, provided you are studying his Word, the Bible, and allowing him to apply it to your life. You simply can't grow without the Bible because it's the only way we can understand who God is and how life works in his kingdom! If you've repented of your sin, believed in your heart that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead, and invited him to be your personal Savior and Lord, God will be changing your desires and the way you live your life and walking you into his purposes rather than your own. He'll be walking you into the good works he's prepared for you to do. He'll be doing this as you earnestly seek him in his Word, communicate with him continually in prayer, and regularly fellowship with his

people through the church. Your saving faith will be shown to be true by your actions and the way you're living your life. Faith in action!

Most of you out there have already seen much evidence in your own lives of saving faith and the effects God has brought about through it. You've already tested yourself to see if you're in the faith and you're confident that you are. So what can you take away from what we've studied today? Well, I'll give you at least 2 ideas. First of all, is your faith in God leading you to take obedient action as you seek God and his purposes? Is your faith in God so full and surrendered and focused that you're willing to take great risks like Rahab did to love God and walk in his ways? Is he what you want above all and are you convinced that in addition to escaping from his wrath through Christ at the moment of salvation, he offers you, through fellowship with him and surrender to his purposes, your only hope of life and joy and peace and strength in every moment of your life on this earth and into eternity? Are you convinced that he is what you're looking for and so much for?

And secondly, as you look at your life and the choices you make, is it reflecting God and his character to the world around you? Is your highest goal in everything you do and say to bring glory to God even when it's difficult or seems impractical? Or are you compromising who God is and how he teaches you to live in order get what you think you want? Is a little lie here and there OK if it helps you get what you want or if it seems necessary to accomplish some greater purpose? Is a little bitterness and refusal to resolve problems with your brother and sister in Christ allowed because they deserve to be punished for what they've done to you? Is the pursuit of money or possessions allowed to be the higher goal in your life?

We've been privileged to be invited to relationship with the one true God, our Creator...to be adopted as his own children...to be set apart for him and his purposes...to live life with him in the strength and power and wisdom of the one who created it all and knows how it all works...to leave behind the darkness and slavery and death and emptiness that characterizes those who aren't in relationship with the one true God. Let's not hold anything back from him or try to keep one foot in the world and one foot in Christ. Let's be like Rahab and go ALL IN no matter the cost because we've come to know the one true God and he is our one and only hope in life! Let's let our faith in him lead us to bold and confident action as we align ourselves with him and surrender fully to his

purposes! In everything we do, let our ultimate goal be to bring him glory and honor! If that truly is your highest goal in every situation and in everything you do in life, you're going to be amazed at how differently you speak and act and handle difficult situations in your life.