

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 25 August 2013

No. T0795

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Women of Faith: Rahab

Today's subject is a woman called Rahab, who lived in Jericho about 3,500 years ago. The people of Israel had been delivered out of the clutches of Egypt, and its cruel ruler Pharaoh. They had been brought miraculously across the Red Sea (See Exodus 14:1-31), and had spent about 40 years in the wilderness. They had recently been brought to the River Jordan, which they would also cross by the miraculous intervention of God (Joshua 1:10-18). Ahead lay the promised land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Their enemies who populated the land had to be conquered, and dispossessed of the land that God had long promised Israel.

The first group of these enemies was concentrated in the city of Jericho, with its local king. We shall focus on what we are told in Joshua 2 and Joshua 6, particularly as it affected Rahab. Firstly, we shall look at her as a person, and her immediate circumstances. Secondly, her hopes and prospects! Thirdly, the details of her actual deliverance! Fourthly, and lastly, the necessary application to us in our day!

1. Rahab herself, in person, and her immediate circumstances.

We have to say that Rahab was, in herself, an immoral woman, a blatant sinner (Joshua 2:1). She was in no position to plead for herself. In addition, she was a member of a nation under the curse of God. No hope or prospect of blessing, either as an individual or on account of her nationality! And yet, God reached out His merciful hand and granted her convictions which brought her into salvation.

The place given to Rahab, in grace, in God's scheme of salvation, is recorded in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus listed in Matthew 1:1-18. She is one of the four women listed in that role of honour (Matthew 1:3-6); Tamar (Matthew 1:3), Rahab (Matthew 1:5), Ruth (Matthew 1:5) and Bathsheba (Matthew 1:6). None of these could be reckoned by nature, race, or practice as a candidate for a place when the God of Israel declared the long line of blessing through to the long promised Messiah of Israel.

But God took account of Rahab's tremendous personal faith by putting her in this distinguished list as the great grandmother of King David. She was plucked from the obscurity of Jericho, a city that would be destroyed and cursed, and brought into a wonderful sphere of blessing.

2. Her hopes and prospects.

The city of Jericho, and all in it, was, because of their sins, set apart for the judgement of God. This is a picture of the present age of this wicked, sinful world in which we live. It is ripe for judgement.

Rahab acknowledged that in herself she was unworthy and incapable of meriting or achieving her own salvation. If there was to be deliverance for Rahab, it had to be from outside of herself. Furthermore, all members of Rahab's family were in the same boat, equally subject to the judgement of God. But God is very often pleased to work through and in families.

3. Her deliverance

Joshua had been selected by God to lead the people of Israel after the death of Moses (Joshua 1:2). He had appointed two spies to go on ahead to see what the situation in Jericho was really like (Joshua 2:1). They had to report back to Joshua as to the character of the opposition they would face when Israel invaded Canaan. It would be useful also for Joshua to know the state of the morale of the inhabitants.

On arrival, the spies lodged overnight at Rahab's house (Joshua 2:1). On hearing her personal witness, they pledged Rahab's salvation, together with her father's household, from the impending destruction of the city (Joshua 2:8-13). They gave her the token of a scarlet cord, to be displayed out of her window to identify her and her family, so that they could be rescued as promised (Joshua 2:17-18).

The scarlet cord! When any gospel-minded Christian believer on the Lord Jesus Christ sees God's use of types and illustrations of New Testament truth in Old Testament incidents, and reads the word 'scarlet' in this narrative, he needs little or no lengthy explanation or exposition to see suggested in the scarlet cord salvation through the blood of Christ. This theme runs right through scripture.

Rahab clearly had faith already when she received the spies. She had realised that the God of Israel was shortly to act in righteous judgement on the system of which Rahab herself was a part (Joshua 2:8-11). With no merit of her own, her only hope of deliverance from the wrath to come was to put her trust in the mercy of that same God. Those who sheltered under her roof, and applied the same faith, would enjoy the same deliverance.

Rahab put herself in great danger by associating with the spies. The king of Jericho had his own and obviously very effective intelligence system, keeping him fully informed of all that was going on in his little kingdom (Joshua 2:2). He was fully aware of the presence of the spies and their purpose for being in his city and kingdom.

The king sent a demand to Rahab to bring the men out of her house (Joshua 2:4). This put her on the spot. If she did not cooperate with the king, she would be placing her life and future in the hands of the men of Israel. It was a crisis not of her making, yet would bring her to a point of decision which would assure for her a pathway of blessing. She was prepared to risk her own life for the spies, and God is no man's debtor.

The king ordered the gates of the city to be locked (Joshua 2:5, 7). In practical terms, the only way out of the city had been closed to the spies. They were now totally dependent on Rahab for their escape. She held their lives in her hands. At any moment, she could have handed them over to the king or his servants. Instead, she had the courage to hide them under the stalks of flax that were stored on her roof (Joshua 2:6). Then, Rahab opened her heart to the spies as she explained to them not only her motive in hiding them, but also her personal hopes for the future (Joshua 2:8-13). What Rahab knew had caused her to hide the spies. Her knowledge had caused her to act. This is an essential element of faith.

The faith of Rahab was based on events she had heard about, but never seen. We read her statement to the spies in Joshua 2:8-11, *"I know that the LORD hath given you the land of Canaan, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, when you came out of the land of Egypt; and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of the River Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."* This information was, of course, very useful for the spies to report back to Joshua.

Rahab then made a request for deliverance from the coming judgement: *"Now, therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have showed you kindness, that you will also show kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token; And that you will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death"* (Joshua 2:12-13).

Her request carried great moral weight because of her previous kindness to the spies. She had already put her faith into practice by her actions, demonstrating the reality of what she said. In response, the spies undertook to spare and rescue both Rahab and those who also had the faith to shelter under her roof, identified by the scarlet cord (Joshua 2:18). It would be a measure of her faith whether she would keep the scarlet cord in the window and retain her family in her house. The actual deliverance would be effected when Israel had conquered the city, and its king.

Paying heed to Rahab's wise counsel, the spies escaped through Rahab's window, out of the city of Jericho (Joshua 2:21). Rahab recommended them to go to the mountain and hide there for three days till their pursuers returned (Joshua 2:22). She thus overcame the two obstacles that hindered their escaping; the shut gate, and the king's search party.

The report the spies brought to Joshua was essentially that which they had received from Rahab (Joshua 2:23-24). This demonstrated the confidence of the spies in the faith that Rahab had not only stated, but also displayed by her actions. The city of Jericho was a major obstacle which had to be removed before the children of Israel could make progress in their conquest of Canaan. Obstacles can be great and the enemies strong, but the believer in God can know victory and progress in spiritual experience when strength and succour are drawn from the Lord. As we read in Ephesians 6:10, *"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might..."*

The imminent battle was to take the form of a long, extended ceremony, rather than a military operation. It must have seemed strange indeed. Naturally speaking, instead of inspiring fear in the city dwellers, they were more likely to make the armies of Israel a laughing stock. Much more important, it was the word of the LORD. For a period of six days, the warriors of Israel had to walk silently right around the wall of the city of Jericho, once a day. No offensive

action had to be undertaken (Joshua 6:3). The ark of God, symbolising the presence of their God in their midst, was to be the central, focal point of the parade, preceded by seven priests blowing trumpets (Joshua 6:4). The same procedure was followed each day. The five days that followed the first one must have seemed very tedious without any decisive action apparently taking place. However, there is no record or mention of any discontent or grumbling by those involved.

The lesson from the six days of marching around the city is that they kept at it with their attention focussed on the ark and the commandment of the LORD, rather than on the ideas of men or the reproach of the enemy. By the end of the six days, they would be fully aware of the magnitude of the task that they faced, as well as of their own helplessness to achieve that task. The LORD was ensuring that both of these lessons were not lost on the people. It is always a great mistake for a believer, indeed anyone, to underestimate a difficulty, or to overestimate his own ability to overcome it.

Having encompassed the city once a day for six days (Joshua 6:12-14), then, on the seventh day they were to walk, still silent, right around the city seven times on that one day (Joshua 6:4). Then, the climax was to be a long blast of the trumpets, accompanied by a great shout by all the people (Joshua 6:5). This was an announcement of judgement upon the inhabitants of Jericho. The great shout was a shout of faith (Hebrews 11:30 says so), and the wall of the city fell flat (Joshua 6:20). The shout in itself did not bring the wall down. The LORD brought the wall down in response to the shout of faith by the people, and the blowing of the trumpets in faith by the priests.

The LORD had truly given them the city but the people had to take action in faith. The LORD did what they could not do (bring down the wall) but they had to possess the city (that is, do what they could do, just like the woman we read of in Mark 14:8). Yet, what appeared to be foolishness in the eyes of the world was true obedience in the sight of God, in accordance with the instructions given by God to Joshua.

The orders were given in detail, but circumstantially none of it would have been possible without the initial personal act of faith of Rahab (see Joshua 2:1-24). The emphasis is not on the fighting prowess of the Israelites, but rather on the miraculous intervention of the LORD, in response to the faith of Rahab.

The consequences for Rahab and her family

Rahab and all her relatives were brought into the shelter of her house, in dependence upon the promise she had received from the spies (Joshua 6:17, 22-25). Joshua had spoken to the spies, prior to the crossing of Jordan, giving them the specific responsibility of securing the rescue and deliverance of Rahab and her relatives. It is again made plain that she, and they, were not being rescued because of any virtue of their own, but rather because of her act of faith in putting her trust in the God of Israel.

Because of the initial personal faith of Rahab, the people of Israel had crossed the Jordan, taken Jericho, and the whole of the promised land of Canaan now lay open before them. As we say, 'from such a tiny acorn, the mighty oak doth grow'. What an outcome! What a tribute to Rahab! What an example of the fruit of the obedience of faith, exemplified in Rahab! Her faith was not misplaced. It did happen. The wall did fall flat, exactly as predicted! Jericho was conquered. Faith was honoured, but first it was tested. This is God's way.

4. What about us?

Romans 15:4 tells us, *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."*

What Rahab was actually, we are spiritually. Personally, sinners, by nature and by practice! Members of the sinful race of mankind! Our prospect, without Christ? Judgement before the Great White Throne! (see Revelation 20:11-15). Our hope? Only in Christ as the Saviour of the World, and our Deliverer from coming wrath (see 1 Thessalonians 1:10). All very true and proper!

But we have not really learned the lesson of Rahab until we have applied the principle to ourselves. *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy God saved us"* (Titus 3:5). Not only for initial, eternal salvation, but throughout our lives, *"we are not sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God"* (2 Corinthians 3:5).

These thoughts should stimulate the Christian, you and me, in our witness. In this world, the spiritual and moral darkness deepens day by day. The Christian is always to have his light burning and shining (Matthew 5:16). Cleared of every charge, justified, by faith, in the sight of God (Romans 5:1)! Justified, vindicated in the sight of men by his deeds, conduct, and lifestyle (James 2:25).

The Lord Jesus truly did the work. He died to save us. He is our deliverer from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10). But He did not remain in the grave. He rose again out from among the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-12) that we might be assured that the work was finished, completed to the full satisfaction of a Saviour God. Then, having secured the victory, He ascended to where He was before (Acts 1:9). He went back to heaven. He is a risen and ascended Saviour. He now lives in the presence of God as our Great High Priest above (Hebrews 9:24). What a Saviour!

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