

# Trust - Rahab

When we were first married, and both new Christians, Keith and I were encouraged to help with children's Sunday groups at Church. It was a helpful discipline to prepare for the sessions and get more familiar with the foundational Bible stories. However, one of the first sessions we led was the story of Rahab the Prostitute who hid the spies. Our hearts sank, how are we going to explain what a prostitute was to a group of 7- and 8-year-olds and anyway why was this woman remembered as a prostitute in the Bible? Couldn't we just call her an inn keeper and keep it simple? As I hope we will see this morning as we look at the account in Joshua together, who Rahab was, and what she did, is central to her story of trust in the God of Israel. God so often uses the people of least worth to play a central role in his kingdom and we too have something to learn from this. I'm going to look at three aspects of trust in God in this story:

1. The spies trust in Rahab, an unlikely saviour
2. Rahab's trust in Israel's God, that leads her to action
3. Rahab's trust in the scarlet cord, which has eternal consequences

## 1. The spies trust in Rahab

The Book of Joshua follows on from Exodus and Numbers. Led by Moses, the people of Israel have been freed from slavery in Egypt and set off on what should have been an 11-day journey across the wilderness from Mount Sinai to Canaan. Just before they entered Canaan 12 spies were sent in to check out the land promised to them by God. The report back was mixed, they would need faith to face the challenges and enter the Promised Land. The Israelites were full of fear, they turn back and spend the next 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Fast forward to the start of Joshua and God has told Moses he is not the one who will lead his people into the Promised Land. The task has been given to Joshua, Moses' assistant. To inherit the land the people must be faithful to the Lord their God and trust that he will fulfil his promise to them.

So, to Joshua Chapter 2 v1. Joshua sends his own two spies to check out the land. However, their behaviour does not seem very trustworthy, the first thing they do when they reach Jericho is enter the house of a prostitute and stay there. But if you are a spy in a foreign land, then a busy inn, with extras, by the City gate, and built into the City wall is probably a

very good place to hang-out, not draw attention to yourselves, and find out what is going on.

It didn't take too long before the King of Jericho discovered that the Israelite spies had arrived and very quickly the spies had to trust Rahab not to expose them and to listen to her instructions. They hid under the flax stalks on her roof whilst she sent the pursuers off in the wrong direction.

What was it that made the spies trust Rahab? There didn't seem to be anything obvious that would mark her out as a dependable or honourable person. One commentator has described Rahab as "embodying the trinity of marginalisation and dishonour in Israelite culture"; a woman, a Canaanite, and a prostitute. Nothing in her character, lineage or reputation that would give her worth or make her a likely saviour for the Israelite spies.

Yet, we see in verses 9 and 11 that she, an outsider, has recognised the God of Israel as the one God of heaven and earth (v 11) and trusts that he will be faithful to his promise to Abraham and to Moses. That he will lead his people out of slavery and give them the Land of Canaan, the promised land (v 9).

In Rahab we see a picture of trust and faithfulness in the God of Israel that has been so lacking in the Israelite people as they turned back from God's promise and wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. Rahab, the least likely saviour, has shown the Israelite spies the trust and faith they need to fulfil God's promise and enter the Promised Land.

There is a challenge here for us as God's people today. Are we at risk of failing to trust God's promise to lead us from slavery to full freedom? Are we still wondering in the wilderness, going round in circles, and not living the full life we have been promised as the rescued people of God?

## 2. Rahab's trust in Israel's God leads to action

Living in the City Wall and close to the City Gate Rahab was well placed to hear the news about the events of the Red Sea and the defeat of the Amorite Kings, Og and Sihon. Her words quote from the Song of Miriam in Exodus 15. Clearly, the accounts about the powerful actions of the God of Israel, had an impact on the Canaanites. Rahab describes her fellow citizens as *melting in fear (v10)*, *everyone's hearts sank and their courage failed (v11)*. But Rahab chooses to trust that this mighty and powerful God can protect her. She acts and hides the spies (v4).

Rahab has a moment of truth, a choice, when the king of Jericho asks her to handover the spies she has hidden (v3). Like the midwives in Egypt, she defies her ruler and with courage and determination trusts for her salvation in the “*God of heaven above and earth below*” (v11). This was an enormous risk, she would be seized as a traitor. But, she made the decision to trust this God to save her and her whole family. She saw a divine opportunity and she took it.

Her faith in action is recalled in Hebrews 11 v31 and James 2 v 25. She appears as one amongst many people of faith in the Old Testament who by their actions showed they had *confidence in what they hope for and assurance about what they do not see* (Heb 11 v1-2).

This is just as relevant to us now but we have the benefit of knowing the bigger picture of God’s redemption plan. Our faith in salvation and rescue from death is not blind, we can trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Do we live our lives filled with this confidence and trust? Does our trust in Jesus for our salvation result in actions of faith and not just words of faith? How is God calling us to step out and take actions of faith at the moment?

### 3. Rahab’s trust in the scarlet cord has eternal consequences

I love Rahab’s tenacity in v 12 *give me a sure sign*. She pushes these spies to reward her trust in their God and to ensure that she and all her family are saved from certain death. They agree a fair exchange v14 ‘Our lives for your lives!’. She lets them down by a rope out of the window of her house in the City Walls and receives an instruction to mark her house with a red cord to ensure she and her family are not destroyed when the Israelites conquer the city.

This image of a red cord marking a building is a striking echo of the events of the Passover. Just as the Israelites were told to shelter in their houses marked with the red blood of the paschal lamb and be spared the fate of death; so Rahab and her family are gathered into her home and spared the destruction that befalls all the unfaithful Canaanites when the city is captured.

The scarlet cord of salvation can be traced through the bible from the beginning in Genesis to its end in Revelation and ultimately is seen in the blood of Jesus poured out on the cross as the full completion of God’s plan to redeem all humanity. Rahab, a woman, apparently of little worth, but with great faith and tenacity, had a vital role to play in God’s redemption plan.

Her story does not end with rescue out of Jericho to live with Israel as promised. In the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 v5 we meet her again, *Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab*. In this patriarchal lineage we see four women from unchosen people groups, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. Women who trusted God and became key players in the Messiah's lineage. Through unconventional means and surprising people, including a prostitute, God is at work to accomplish his work in humanity.

Who Rahab was, a woman, a Canaanite, and a prostitute, is central to her story of trust in the God of Israel. God so often uses the people of least worth to play a central role in his kingdom. Do we believe that is true for us? God can use us whatever our background, education, family background or past experiences to play our part in his kingdom story. We may never see the results of our faithful trust in God but we can trust that if we take action to build God's kingdom it will have eternal consequences.