



RAHAB'S REDEMPTION

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 2:1-24

Fourth Message

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This Father's Day is a rather sentimental one for me, since my son graduated from high school last week. It's hard to believe that the baby I cuddled in my arms just yesterday, it seems, has graduated from high school and is looking forward to his college years.

Graduations make us want to look to the future, and the speeches that are a part of the process are filled with optimism. Last week, the thought most often expressed by students and teachers alike at my son's graduation was a word to the graduates to have faith in themselves. You can do anything you set your mind to, they were told. All your dreams can come true, they were assured.

As a dreamer myself, I'm not one to discount dreams. However, as I listened to the speeches and heard the philosophy they expounded, I thought to myself, this isn't reality. The sentiments expressed sound attractive, but they are not consistent either with theology or the human condition. Sure, the future can hold great joys and wonderful experiences, but there will be pain, struggles, disappointments and sorrows, too. Graduation dreams will die, because life is hard and suffering is guaranteed.

Listen to the words of the late Henri Nouwen describing his own journey in life:

I have become deeply aware of my own sorrow-filled heart. There was a time when I said: 'Next year I will finally have it together,' or 'When I grow more mature these moments of inner darkness will go,' or 'Age will diminish my emotional needs.' But now I know that my sorrows are mine and will not leave me. In fact, I know they are very old and very deep sorrows, and that no amount of positive thinking or optimism will make them less. The adolescent struggle to find someone to love me is still there; unfulfilled needs for affirmation as a young adult remain alive in me. The deaths of my mother and many family members and friends during my later years cause me continual grief. Beyond all that, I experience deep sorrow that I have not become who I wanted to be, and that the God to whom I have prayed so much has not given me what I have most desired.

Not only must students face the personal struggles expressed by this writer, it is evident that we live in a dark and fearful world. Society is anti-God, anti-people and anti-moral. The world is pro-choice, pro-violence, and pro-self.

So when we think about the future in realistic terms, either as graduates or as senior citizens, is there any hope for optimism, joy and encouragement? The Scriptures answer with a resounding, yes! Life is hard, but out of death comes life, out of sorrow comes joy, and out of unfulfilled dreams can come all that our hearts long for—and the source of this optimism and hope for the future is God and his plan of redemption.

In our studies in the book of Joshua we have seen that Israel's entering into the land following forty years of wilderness wanderings is a picture of the Christian's entering into life and redemption in Jesus Christ. This morning we come to the story of Rahab, from chapter 2 of Joshua. I will read the text and make some observations on it; then I will draw out three spiritual reflections from the narrative.

The story begins with Joshua sending two spies into the land. Joshua 2:1 (NASB):

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.

As Israel is still preparing to enter Canaan, Joshua sends two spies into the land to check things out. He especially wants to learn about the city of Jericho, which will be his first conquest. This is a good strategic move on Joshua's part. Sending spies into the land is reminiscent of Moses, who sent twelve spies on a similar mission. Only two of those twelve brought back positive news, however; the other ten infected the entire nation with fear, so that Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Why only two spies this time? Joshua had learned a lesson. When you have the right two, two are all you need.

Verses 2-7:

And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." 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." 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. And 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." 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. 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.

The two men come to the house of Rahab, who is reported to be a "harlot." This is confirmed by James in his epistle. Perhaps she was also an innkeeper. Literally, the text says that the spies "lay down" there. They did not go there because they were looking for a harlot. I rather think they came to Rahab's establishment because they wanted to remain incognito on their assignment. We learn later that Rahab lived on the city wall of Jericho, so her house was a base of speedy escape.

The king of Jericho learned of the presence of the spies and sent to Rahab for the men. In response, Rahab lied and sent the king's men on a wild goose chase. With her reputation, it is remarkable that the men did not search the house. Perhaps they were clients themselves, or they feared whom they might find there.

Some would say that Rahab's deception was unethical, and that God was validating this kind of action. Theologians explain this dilemma is several ways. The question is, Was Rahab right in deceiving her own people? I would say that her deception was perfectly valid. After all, this was war, and in war, deception is part of the game. Warring parties know this. In baseball, we have the squeeze play; in football, the fake field goal or the fake punt. Teams understand that deception is part of the game. So it is with war. A modern day illustration of this principle would be the actions of Corrie Ten Boom in hiding Jews in Nazi-controlled Holland.

Verses 8-11:

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, 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. 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. And 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."

After the king's men have departed and the city gate is shut, Rahab goes up to the roof and talks to the two spies. Essentially, her question to them is this: "Where have you been? We have been waiting forty years for you to come and defeat us." She knows that God has given Israel the land, that the terror of Israel has fallen on them, and that the people have melted away. She tells the spies that they had heard how God dried up the Red Sea and that Israel had defeated the two kings of the Amorites. She reveals that there was no spirit left among the Canaanites. They were a defeated people before the battle had even begun. That is why she finds it hard to understand why it had taken so long for Israel to enter Canaan. Further, she confesses that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of all creation.

Next, Rahab requests salvation from these men for herself and her family.

Verses 12-16:

"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 win-

dow, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. And she said to them, "Go to the hill country, lest the pursuers happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days, until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way."

Rahab has dealt kindly with the two spies, now she asks them to deal kindly with her and her entire household. The words "deal kindly" are the key covenant word, *hesed*, the word which God uses in covenant relationships with man. The men agree to her request, and she lets them escape, using a rope to lower them down the city wall, much like Paul escaped to safety in Damascus.

Verses 17-21 magnify the agreement made between Rahab and the spies:

And 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. And 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." And 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.

In these verses, their conversation is magnified in flashback fashion, because the author wants to fill in some important details. The men tell Rahab that there are three conditions to their oath. If any one of them is violated, then they will not have any blood upon their heads. The first condition is that Rahab tie a scarlet thread on the window; the second is that only those who are in her house will be spared; the third is that she cannot relate any of this business to anyone. Rahab agrees to the conditions, and instantly ties a scarlet thread on the window.

Verses 22-24:

And they departed and came to the hill country, and remained there for three days until the pursuers returned. Now the pursuers had sought them all along the road, but had not found them. Then the two men returned and came down from the hill country and crossed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they related to him all that had happened to them. And they said to Joshua, "Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us."

The two spies escape to the hill country for three days to avoid capture; then they cross back over the Jordan, no easy task, and report to Joshua: "The LORD has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us."

I will now draw three spiritual principles from these verses. The first one is this: The enemies in our land are absolutely terrified and are already defeated.

The land has been given to us by God and no enemy can

stand before us because we are in Christ. We have already discussed this theme. What is added in the story of Rahab is news of the utter despair that resides in the hearts of the enemy.

Four words in the text point out this truth. The first word is “terror”: “The terror of you has fallen upon us” (9). The word means dread, fear, horror. David gives an image of this kind of dread in Psalm 55:4-5:

**My heart is in anguish within me,
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fear and trembling come upon me;
And horror has overwhelmed me.**

Did you know that the enemies you are so fearful of are in terror of you?

The second word, “melted away,” is found in verse 9: “The people of the land have melted away” (9, 24). The word has the idea of both trembling and dissolving. It describes the panic-stricken condition that God’s judgment causes in the hearts of his enemy.

The Old Testament has many examples of this word: “The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord” (Ps. 97:5); “He raises his voice and the earth melts” (Ps. 46:6); “God touches the land and it melts” (Amos 9:5).

The word in verse 11, “our hearts melted,” is a different term from the one in verse 9, but it has the same meaning. Some outside force causes the “melting,” which is physical and emotional distress. This word is used in other places in the Old Testament: “In the presence of God, the mountains dissolve” (Nah. 1:5); and when David faced the fear of death, he wrote: “My heart is like wax; it is melted within me” (Ps. 22:14).

The fourth word is “courage”: “No courage remained in any man any longer” (v. 11). Literally, “no spirit arose in any man.” They had given up; they were beaten; there was no fight left in them.

Exodus 15:13-16 combines all these words for “melt” and “terror” to describe Israel’s future victory in the land:

**In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people
whom Thou hast redeemed;
In Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy
habitation.
The peoples have heard, they tremble;
Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.
Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;
The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them;
All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.
Terror and dread fall upon them;
By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as
stone;
Until Thy people pass over, O LORD,
Until Thy people pass over whom Thou hast pur-
chased.**

All of creation melts and trembles in the presence of God—and so do God’s enemies and ours. They are fearful and despairing, defeated and demoralized as we enter into our life in Christ. They know the power of God and they know that he is with us. When the demons encountered Jesus, they were in dread of him. They knew who he was and what they were up against. They had no hope for victory; all they wanted to do was survive.

But this is not our experience, is it? Usually, we are the ones who feel defeated and fearful. We are demoralized, we live in terror, we have no spirit of courage within us. We do not feel we can stand toe to toe and have at it with the things that torment us. As a result, we do not enter the land. We choose instead to wander in the wilderness year after year. But our enemies are more afraid of us than we can imagine. They are saying, “Where are you? Why don’t you come and put an end to us? Don’t you know how powerful your God is?” The reason we don’t experience victory over our enemies is because we don’t show up for the battle. We would rather cower in our foxholes.

How many times in your life have you put off doing something you were afraid of doing? Perhaps it involved a conversation you knew would be difficult, an addiction you thought you could not live without, a Bible study you were afraid to teach, a secret you thought you couldn’t share. You didn’t think you had what it takes. But then you finally got up the nerve and risked, and it wasn’t nearly as hard as you imagined. You sensed that God was with you, and you thought to yourself, “Why did I wait so long?”

We all have enemies, fears, doubts, moods, attitudes and dark areas of sin that paralyze us, control us and hinder our freedom in Christ. They may appear to be deeply entrenched, alarmingly powerful and woefully controlling, but they quake in the presence of God. This is why we are encouraged, along with Joshua, to be strong and bold. Not only is God with us, our enemies are shaking in their boots in fear of us.

Here is my second principle: In a dark world about to be judged, there remains a way of salvation.

Our world is on the brink of judgment. Listen to what Henri Nouwen says about this: “I see parentless children roaming the streets of Sao Paulo like packs of wolves. I see young boys and girls being sold as prostitutes in Bangkok. I see the emaciated prisoners of war in the camps of former Yugoslavia. I see the naked bodies of people in Ethiopia and Somalia wandering aimlessly in the eroded desert. I see millions of lonely, starving faces all over the world, and large piles of the dead bodies of people killed in cruel wars and ethnic conflicts.”

We cannot save the world from destruction. And we cannot save creation, which is awaiting eagerly the revelation of the new heavens and the new earth. But in the midst of a society about to be judged, like Jericho and Canaan, there is a way of salvation, because even now, God is in the process of saving people.

Rahab is a wonderful picture of this salvation. Israel was about to enter the promised land under the mighty right hand of God, and Jericho was about to be destroyed. Rahab had been a prostitute, a victim of a sin-drenched society, but she was about to experience the same salvation as Israel.

How did Rahab gain this salvation? First, she confessed her faith in Yahweh as the one and true God, the God of heaven and earth. Second, she recognized that her deliverance would come only through loyal love, and she appealed to this loyal love, a pledge of truth and faithfulness, from the two spies. Third, she acted decisively to tie a scarlet cord on her window. The cord was the sign that would keep her and her house safe when judgment came. Imme-

diately we are reminded of the Passover. Then, the red blood of the lamb splashed on the doorposts of the Israelites became a sign so that all the first-born of Israel were saved when God visited Egypt with the plague of death. Rahab would find refuge in the house marked by the sign of the blood of the lamb. She believed, and indicated her belief by immediately obeying what she was told to do. She did not delay one day or three days or a week. She tied the red cord on her window at once. She burned all her bridges with a world that was about to be judged and placed her hope on God's loyal love.

Salvation comes for all who take refuge in the cross, in the blood of the Lamb. We can be saved from the terror and judgment of the Lord, before whom all of creation trembles and all enemies melt. It makes no difference where we live, who we are, or what we have done. We must make our appeal to God's loyal love, the only basis by which we may be delivered, and by which we enter into a relationship with him. We align ourselves with God's people and make evil and sin our enemies. We no longer are friends with the world; we become God's friends. We burn our bridges with the world and sell out completely to immediate obedience.

The postscript for Rahab is that she is listed in the "hall of fame" of faith in Hebrews 11. In James 2, she is held up as a model of a faith that works. This is our hope as we face the future in a dark and evil world.

The third principle is this: When we are bold and strong to fight the enemies in our lives we become agents of God's loyal love, pronouncing salvation to the lost.

As we look upon our dark and depraved world it is easy for us to become discouraged, critical and judgmental. We can try to fix things by controlling the institutions of power, protecting ourselves from all outside influences or removing ourselves completely and hiding away. Jesus did none of these things. He was the agent of God's love, pronouncing salvation to people like Rahab: to a woman who anointed his feet with tears, to another woman at a well in Samaria, to a woman caught in adultery, a tax collector sitting in a tree, a man with a demon. In the midst of a world going to hell, Jesus came to be an agent of God's loyal love.

All too often we are so consumed with fear as we face our enemies that we are not aware of people like Rahab who are caught in darkness but long to be set free. All too often we wander in the wilderness year after year when we should be agents of God's love to people trapped in sin but desperate to be loved. There are people waiting for us to tell them the good news so that they can be delivered from judgment. Rahab waited for forty years for someone to bring her salvation. Who has been waiting for you to tell them of God's marvelous redemption? Perhaps a neighbor, a co-worker, a family member. Perhaps it is someone with long hair or strange clothes or a marginal occupation, but they are waiting to hear about the love of God.

About five years ago, a young man named David who was not a believer began coming to our singles group and spending time with one of our Christian sisters. I was concerned about this, so when he asked me to play a round of golf with him, I agreed. On the golf course, however, I was more concerned about how I was playing than I was about my long-haired friend. At the end of that summer he told me he had something to say to me. I thought to myself, "Oh no, they're engaged!" Then he told me he had become a Christian. I was thrilled. David now has a wonderful wife and is a vital part of our community. I always tell him that God must love him a lot. As I think about this text this morning, I think about this young man who was ready for salvation, because God had prepared the way for him.

The world has many Rahabs and Davids waiting to be saved. May God give us the courage to enter the land. May he give us eyes to see those who are caged by the darkness but want desperately to be set free.

As I reflected on graduation last week, I wondered what the future holds for my son. It is easy for me to become fearful. I know the enemies facing him are real. The optimistic thoughts expressed and felt through the graduation ceremonies last week won't be enough to carry him through. It is not just a matter of will power, determination or heroism. But I also know that God can be with him and that his enemies are terrified of this God. There is a way of salvation and redemption. That is why I have a real sense of hope and optimism as he takes on new territory and enters into the land.

May God's salvation and power be the source of hope and optimism for ourselves and for our children.

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