

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to Joshua 2 as we continue through this book of Joshua. It is the first book in our Bibles with someone's name attached to it. It was probably written by Joshua, although we couldn't say that for sure. I can tell you for sure that the book itself covers about 25 years of history. The exodus was about 1445 B.C. In 1405 B.C., they went into the land. In 1379 B.C., we kind of come to the end of the book of Joshua. So, 25 years forward.

The nation of Israel had been in captivity for 430 years; 30 years with Joseph and knowing Pharaoh was a pretty good time for them; 400 years as slaves. When Moses showed up, there were nine months of plagues from God's hand that finally convinced the Pharaoh to let God's people go. They walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. God drowned the Egyptians, and then He led them six weeks of travel into the wilderness -  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million folks. They ended up at Mount Sinai, where they would sit before the LORD for nearly a year - learning to know Him better, to know His holiness, to know their sinfulness, to know His graciousness and favor. They got the law, they got the priesthood, they learned about the blood sacrifice and the sacrificial kind of substitution that God had planned to save man. And then an eleven-day 126-mile walk from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea just on the borders of the Land of Promise that God had made them. And they sent twelve spies, and ten came back with a terrible report - so much so that they were able to convince  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million people that the God that had brought them through all of that could not be trusted to bring them in. Only Joshua and Caleb were left of the adults there - at least of the spies who said otherwise - but they were booed down and about killed as a result. God's response was, "Fine. You don't want to go in, I'll let you wander around in the wilderness and die, and then I'll bring your kids in." And so everybody 20 years of age and older went back into the wilderness, and, for the better part of 38 years that were left, wandered around and died. And it was only the last year or so - before this book of Joshua - that God brought the people back to this place, and they began to experience His delivering power. They fought enemies on the eastern side of the Jordan far stronger than they, and they watched God deliver them as they looked to Him and believed in Him. And so they now find themselves here on the border of the Promised Land - a second generation. Moses has died. God has caused him to give the people a last thirty-day cheering on in the book of Deuteronomy. And now the time of mourning is

gone, and a time of moving begins. There's very little written in the Bible about those 38 years of wandering because they weren't going anywhere. But now they are ready to move forward, and Joshua is the newly-appointed leader. He's the guy that's now going to be in charge.

We spent a week - a couple of weeks ago - looking at how God prepared Joshua for this work. It's a good study. If you haven't heard it, I suggest you go listen to it because God has a way of preparing us for what He has prepared for us. And then last week we looked at chapter 1, and we spoke specifically about God's word to the nation through Joshua that they needed to walk forward by faith, believing the promises of God. In fact, He said, "Every place you put your foot, that's yours. Every place you put your foot, that belongs to you." And so God had made a promise, He had made a provision, but they would need to act. And that's usually the case with us as well. God makes promises, but we have to act upon them, and if we don't, they'll just kind of lay there. Faith acts. It is one of the reasons why, between Deuteronomy and Joshua, we spent sixteen weeks in Hebrews 11 - just looking at faith that acts.

We mentioned to you last week that the promise of God for land (there in verse 4 of chapter 1) was about 300,000 square miles. Now that's a lot of territory - all the way to the Euphrates, all of Iraq, all of Jordan, lots of Lebanon, Egypt - just a phenomenal promise. When King David came to power (years from now), under the zenith of his rulership, they occupied 30,000 square miles. I mean, that's as big as it got - 10%. And that's a pretty good lesson. Now, one day they're going to occupy all of it, even as the Lord has said. But we mentioned last week that God has far more available for us than we are often willing to accept or that we're often willing to walk in. We almost don't want to believe God for that good of stuff or that much - how can God possibly? And so we end up short of what God has promised us or that we're willing to look to Him for.

Joshua provides the historical connection between this time and this group and the next seven books in the Bible. They are all attached through Joshua. This is the going into the land, and the next seven books after Joshua will talk about the practicality of living in the land. But all of them have one lesson to teach - these eight books - and that is: what seems impossible with man is not impossible with God, and, prophetically, it shows us a lot about what Jesus would come to do. So we find ourselves in that position of learning to walk by faith.

We mentioned to you last week the book's pretty easily outlined. The first five chapters are the going into the land, entering the land. The next seven chapters (6-12) are the conquering of the land. And then the last twelve chapters (13-24) are all about dividing the land and the responsibilities that come with it.

So, we ended last week in chapter 1. In fact, you might remember verse 17 the people said to Joshua, "As we heeded Moses in everything, we're going to heed you as well." And I think I mentioned last week that doesn't seem too confident and hopeful because they weren't so good to Moses.

But the strategy to conquer the land begins tonight. Jericho was the first target. It was the middle of the country. Just look at a map. Jericho is literally in the middle of what was then the Land of Promise. From there, they will sweep (in Joshua) south. They will head into the Valley of Aijalon. They'll defeat five kings. They'll head towards Gaza (which is in the news, certainly, a lot), and then they'll come back to the middle, to Gilgal, by the Jordan. And then, instead of going south, they'll go north, and they'll go towards Hazor and all. So, middle, south, north. That's pretty much the plan God had made. Three main campaigns, thirty different cities of greater and lesser strength before we get into seven and a half years where the division of the land takes place. But Jericho was first. And it's an ancient city. If you go to Israel today, there are some ruins of ancient Jericho, although there's not really much to see. But the positioning is certainly still in the same place. And so it's across from Mount Nebo, where Moses went up to die. It is right by the wilderness, where Jesus spent forty days and forty nights being tempted by the enemy. We will read a lot about kings in the next couple of books - the king of Jericho, the king of Hazor. You should know that, at best, those are mayors. They weren't really kings like you think about the king today. They were local magistrates who ruled. Every walled city had a government, and usually they were called a king. But it really is a much smaller deal than you might suspect.

Well tonight we want to look at chapter 2, as we continue getting ready to take the land. Verse 1 says, "Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.' So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, 'Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country.' So the king of Jericho sent 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 country.' Then the woman took the two men and

hid them. So she said, 'Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.' (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.) Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate." I don't doubt that Joshua, in now coming to this position, remembered the twelve spies and thought, "I'm not sending twelve spies." There were only two good spies. I guess maybe that's why he carefully thought and said, "I'm going to pick two guys." And I'll bet he picked guys he trusted; I don't know. How about you? He didn't want the same fiasco that had happened 40 years earlier. So, the direction from Joshua was pretty clear. "Do reconnaissance on the city of Jericho." Now, we do not yet read of God explaining how Jericho was going to fall, and the LORD won't really lay that out for them until a little while later.

But, suffice it to say, even when you are walking in faith, you have to do your homework. Right? In other words, there's a responsibility that comes to us to just be wise. Pray the Lord protect your house, and then lock the door. Pray that God get you a job, and then go knocking on doors. Right? There's a part that we play. And there's nothing lacking in faith for Jericho to be spied out. They had no idea what they were up against; they had no idea what the LORD might ask of them. So you do your best, and then you commit the rest. Faith demands works, and it is an active part of faith to be wise. Now, it would turn out to be a wise strategy because when these men came back, they would bring a message to Joshua that would just encourage him to no end. In fact, in verse 24 which is the last verse of our chapter tonight, these men came back and said to Joshua, " 'Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us.' "

Well, they came to the house of a harlot, verse 1. Now, you may ask why, and I suspect it was the local place to hang out. It was a place, an inn, that had more than room rates on the menu; a place to hide out. Imagine being a Hebrew man, and here you're in the midst of a foreign people, and man, your language is going to give you away, your dress is going to give you away; it's going to be hard for you to fit in. It just isn't you. And yet they had to try. And apparently, from what we read, they didn't do a very good job of it, but they were on a dangerous mission. And they run into this woman, a harlot named Rahab.

You remember your high school yearbook? I happened to run across mine, moving some stuff the other day. It was frightening. But I don't know if they still have the "Most Likely to Succeed" section - we had one of those - and "Most Popular" and "Most Spirited" and "Most Athletic;" and, yeah, I didn't make any of those lists. But it seems to me if God had a yearbook out, His only category would be "Most Unlikely to Succeed" because it does seem to me, as you go through the Scriptures, that God is really good at taking the rejects of the world and making them the most amazing servants of all. And maybe that's why we have great hope - that God could use us. He takes the unreasonable and the (to take a phrase from our news) "deplorable folks," and He brings glory to His name through them. Paul got that when he wrote to the Corinthians in (1 Corinthians 1:27) the first chapter, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty." And Rahab's a perfect example of that, isn't she? I mean, here's a woman living in a city filled with real hateful, sinful people who worshipped all kinds of gods, and she finds herself in a country that's slated to be destroyed because God's mercy has ended in terms of their future. He had waited all of those years. And yet, here is the "Most Unlikely to Succeed" woman who comes through. Jacob, in the Old Testament, was a real manipulator. If you remember "Leave It To Beaver" years ago, he's the Eddie Haskell of the Old Testament. Only the old folks will probably get that. I've tried to get a younger idea, I have no idea. (Laughing) He was suave with his tongue, but he was a master hustler. He was amazing and a hypocrite until God reached his heart. Or take Jonah. Jonah - Mr. I'm-going-the-other-way. "God says, 'Go this way,' I'm going that way." Not exactly a guy that you'd pick to succeed. He's the other-way prophet, and yet God would use him. Or Peter - Mr. Put-your-shoe-in-your-mouth-whenever-possible. I mean, these are rough kinds of materials to work with, and yet God took them. And when Peter had his life transformed, God used Peter greatly; but he's a most-unlikely candidate. So I hope tonight, if you are here, and you wonder - as this new year starts - gosh, how is the Lord going to use me, and maybe you've come up on a big zero on your page of things I can bring to the table, you're in pretty good company. Because it seems to me those who stand out in the Scriptures are usually those who made the category in the yearbook "Most Unlikely to Succeed." You could make that list.

Now Rahab ends up in Hebrews 11 as a woman of faith; ends up in Matthew 1 in the genealogy of Jesus. Not bad for a girl who came from the wrong side of the tracks, living in the midst of a people who God had determined to destroy for their idolatrous ways. And Rahab had developed some strong convictions. Notice in

verse 2 that her understanding about the children of Israel, as we continue, will be one of hearsay and tale-telling by those who have come and gone over many years. And yet her strong convictions about their God (especially you can read in verse 9), "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you," is exactly what the two spies will report to Joshua at the end of the chapter. She has come and determined that their God is the right God. And so, when she has the opportunity to talk to these two men in hiding, and now the king's men or the mayor's men or the local police come to the door asking about the spies, she lies. "Yeah, they were here. I didn't know where they came from, and I don't know where they've gone. But they didn't leave too long ago. So if you hurry, you might find them." And meanwhile, up on her roof, underneath the crops, she has hidden these two young men out of sight of the king's police force; which obviously brings up the question of situational ethics.

Could it be right to lie under certain circumstances? Is there a time when lying would be the right choice for you? Are there times when it is better to lie than to tell the truth? Will God use your lying to accomplish His purposes? Ever? Now, if you just stop and think about it for a minute, you might say, "Well, yeah." Like when someone says, "Do you like my dress?" and you don't. "Oh, yeah, that's...." You could just say, "Well, that's a dress." (Laughing) I mean, are there times when it is easier just to not tell the whole truth? And it may initially seem like a hard question because we can come up with lots of suppositional cases where we think the answer might be "yes." You should know that the Bible leaves no open door to that kind of reasoning. None. You know, you get to the New Testament, and Jesus said (in John 8:44), "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." So anything that you would try to contemplate, "Well, you know, it could be good," no, it can't be good. It's a lie of the enemy. It is a standing with hell against the things of God. The Bible does teach us, though, that sometimes there is great wisdom in simply saying nothing. Ecclesiastes 3:7 - there is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." That's not such a bad idea. Sometimes you should just "zip it," you know? Don't say anything rather than saying something. And I suspect that in most suppositional cases, saying nothing might be the right answer.

So here's Rahab, with a conviction about God that is based upon hearsay but yet proven so, whose faith and determination is very unlike everyone in her city (because no one survives but her and her family). It is distinct from the culture in which she lives. Her background is running a harlotry house. She understands life in the streets and life in the world and how people are. And yet her determination is, "This God of these men is certainly the one that's going to take the land from us." She is sure of it, and she understands that, and she feels this obligation to protect these men, and so she lies. Could God have protected them without her help? Of course He could. Would He have done so? Of course He would. That wasn't the issue. The issue is, for Rahab, this is all that she knows. And, in her defense, she's lived a life of the world in such a way that only hearing the reports of what happened on the east side of the river that past year, and hearing even more distant reports of what had happened at the Red Sea 40 years earlier, she comes to the point where she just says, "I have to take a stand with them." But she doesn't know anything else about God, and so she has this very limited knowledge of the one true God. She's responding to the limited light that she has. She does so with an amazing amount of faith because it puts her life in absolute jeopardy, and she can't really even explain much about this God or what kind of God He is or will He give her favor, or is this going to turn out for good or evil. But she just believes that she can do the best that she can do, so she's going to lie to hide these men. And you should know that God doesn't chastise her for it anywhere. Is it the best way to go? No. But do you remember being a young believer and having some ideas that were not the best? I remember getting saved on a Thursday and calling work on a Friday and saying I was sick because I wanted to stay home and read my Bible; and I was sure God would be happy with me calling in sick when I was fine. And then I called in sick Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday....called in sick for eleven days straight because I wanted to finish the Bible. And I read it in eleven days. And I was calling (Pastor Jack starts coughing) "Thank You, Jesus. Now, where were we?" (Laughing) Makes no sense.

But, look. Look at Rahab's cost for what she is doing. She risks her own life for these two men because her conviction is that their God is the only God, and they are His people. In fact, in many ways (I'm not trying to make a case for her lying), her displayed faith in action is far ahead of the children of Israel who are sitting on the other side of the Jordan waiting for a report. They're waiting to hear how it's going to go, and, "Oh, man, I hope we get good news." But here's a woman living in town who is absolutely sure that the God who is with them is the same God that she's going to serve. These folks on the other side of the Jordan had seen more

miracles at God's hand, seen food fall out of the sky and water come out of the rocks, and you name it, they've seen it. And they're tentative. She's not at all. They'd seen what she could never have seen, and yet she draws the same conclusion about their God only because she's heard the word about His great work.

Now here's the problem for Rahab - she couldn't have known that the God of Israel was a God of love. In her culture, in her life, in her understanding, all the gods were wicked men. You didn't get near any of them. You'd better not talk to any of them. They could kill you soon as look at you. They dominated over you. And yet something about the God of the Jews attracted her. "We're all afraid of you. Our hearts are faint because of you." She'd learned He's a good God who's come to save.

Verse 9 we just read, but verse 8, "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, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.' " That's quite a mouthful, isn't it? Now, a couple of things. Number one - if we go back 40 years to Numbers 13 or so, and those forty spies came back, do you remember what they said to the people? They said to the people there, beginning in verse 27 of Numbers 13, " 'We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there' " (or of the giants). " 'The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.' Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.' But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.' And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants);



and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.' " Now that's the report. "We're going to be cooked. We try this, we're going to die." The truth was Jericho was afraid they were coming. They were fearful of them coming. That's exactly what this woman says. "Since we heard about the Red Sea and then also about the latest campaign this last year, what we heard from 40 years ago and what we heard from last year, it has utterly left us melting in hearts. We have no courage. We have no strength. We know we're cooked!" That's a far different response than the ten spies brought from the land. They were afraid of "you and your God." It wasn't the other way around. The problem was, for these ten spies, they took their fear, and they didn't view it through the lens of faith. They didn't see God, and so their fears multiplied. If you'll go back and read Numbers 13, you'll say even some of the giants are there, and then, by the time they're done talking, they're going, "Every guy's a giant. There isn't a small guy in the place! They're all monsters." Well that couldn't be right. Had to be some little guys somewhere. But because they weren't looking at life from the standpoint of God being in charge, the problem that they saw was magnified in their understanding, and the obstacle began to grow, and the truth began to be distorted, and everything was out of proportion. And yet here's the truth - Rahab tells them the truth. "Since we heard about you 40 years ago, we've been terrified! And now that you're getting closer to the border, we're even more so. We don't know where to turn or where to look."

Joshua and Caleb saw the very same thing that the ten spies did. They saw the walled cities. They saw how tall the giants really were. They saw the difficulty in the land and the armies and the installations where they had set up. But they said (same two guys), "No problem. God's with us. They're there for the taking. Let's go get them." It's all a matter of perspective, right? Two guys who knew the LORD and saw life through the filter of God being with them, and ten people who lost their perspective of God being with them, said, "He's not to be trusted," and saw everything grow in their understanding and making it, for themselves, worse and worse and worse. Bring God into the problem - the One who cannot fail, who tells us nothing is impossible with Him - and then things shrink. It's like holding your Bible up, blocking out the sun. The sun is much larger than the earth. Did you know you can put 1.3 million earths into the square miles of the sun? 1.3 million of our earths can fit into the sun. The sun's a big dude. Just sayin'. But it's 93 million miles away. So if you grab your Bible and hold it up, you can block out the entire sun - that's 1.3 million times as wide as the earth. Won't even see it. There you go! Take the Bible, and move it a mile away, and you're going to go blind looking

at it because that sun is going to overwhelm the Bible. Kind of that way for these ten guys. Right? Which is why, when the two men came back, and they said, in verse 24 (Joshua 2), "Everyone's terrified of us," Joshua said, "I knew that. I knew that 40 years ago." If the people only would have listened to that, it would have been great. It's all about perspective. Joshua and Caleb had a large God, so they had a little problem. The rest of the people had a little God and had an entirely larger problem, and that problem, because God's out of the picture, just keeps getting worse. Your mind now begins to imagine. Your heart runs in different directions. If you have a big God, it leaves you with small problems. Fear and faith are mutually exclusive.

And the difference between Rahab and even most of the other Canaanites, according to verses 10 and 11, is she said, "We have heard, and our hearts have melted." She didn't just hear the information. It affected her. Most of the Canaanites are going to refuse to listen, and God's going to destroy them because He's given them enough time to respond, and they haven't, and eternal judgment's about to fall. But that's not going to be true for her life. In fact, if you look at verse 11, she says this, " 'And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.' " "I'm convinced." Rahab exhibits what you could use as an outline, if you ever want to share with people, of what we would call saving faith. It literally is defined in a few verses here. I mean, she needed literal salvation first of all, and sure salvation. And saving faith is distinct from other kinds of faith; or at least the way that the word is used. Saving faith is not just a subjective belief. It is based upon objective evidence. Saving faith puts its faith in a Person, right? It isn't just, "Well, that's how I feel." You ever talk to somebody and you say, "Hey, you know what the Bible says?" and they'll say, "Well that's not how I feel." "Well how do you feel?" "Well here's how I feel," and then they'll paint you a picture, and you'll say, "That's not in the Bible anywhere," and they go, "Well that's just how I feel." That's all subjective. But saving faith is objective evidence that is revealed evidence from God to you. That's what saves.

So here's what saving faith involves - it involves your mind, it involves your emotions, it involves your will, and it involves a response or an action because faith without works is dead. Look at verse 9. What does she say? She says, "I know." That's a mind fact. The mind is seen in "I know." She declares clearly that her understanding, having looked at the evidence, is that she has come to a conclusion.

"I know that the LORD has given you the land." How does she know that? "That the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. I know. I know that your God is God." First step in any kind of saving faith. You come to the understanding and to the realization of who God is. Her emotions are involved. Notice she says, "We're fearful in heart. Our confidence is melting away. I need to know Him." But then comes her will, and her will is found in verse 12, notice, "Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death." It is the will, it is the emotion, it is the mind and then the action. So, what does she do? She hides these men. That's all she knows. "I'm going to invest my life and all of its risks in the saving of these two men who serve a God that I know is coming, who's going to overwhelm us, who's going to take us out. And what I want from him, I want to be spared. I need salvation. I need to be delivered." So she hides them, in her actions, at great personal risk. She's all in. Her mind knows. Her emotions are that she's melting in place, that she isn't able to do anything. Her will is that she's going to serve Him no matter what the cost. And her action is that she's going to hide these guys and then turn the authorities away, come what may. What if they'd have been caught, and they ratted her out? She doesn't know. What if their God turns out to dislike her.....and her job and the way she pronounces her last name? What if God was just angry and furious? She doesn't know anything. But she knows what she knows, and she acts upon it. She asks them, in exchange for her kindness and risk, that they spare the lives of her extended family, "My mom and my dad, my brothers and sisters, my cousins and nieces. I just want to be sure that we can all live. Let us live." And her love for her family and her knowledge of God drives her to seek this salvation. And it's usually the case in most people's lives. When you get saved, the first people you go to share with are your family. That's kind of where she's at, as well.

Well, verse 14, "So the men answered her, 'Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that you will deal kindly and truly with you.' Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. And she said to them, 'Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way.' So the men said to her: 'We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the

window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home. So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear.' " So the men escape, but they honor Rahab's request. Rahab is now, essentially, saved, is she not, if she continues to do what she has been told. Her conclusions about God, her feelings about who He is, her understanding of what she has come to know, have brought her to this place. "You've just got to stay in the house. When we come in, anybody outside your door is not safe."

There's a ministry in Holland called the Scarlet Thread. We had an opportunity a couple of different times to deal with them. It is a group of very big men who walk prostitutes (that sit in the windows in Amsterdam) home at 2:00 in the morning from their jobs. And they do so just to share the gospel with them; oh, to keep them safe, but that's really the ruse. The purpose is to share their faith. And so these guys have been at it for 26-27 years, where there's just a ministry of men who come, and they take these girls home. They're living difficult lives. Many of them are from different nationalities and backgrounds, and they sometimes don't even know the language very well. But they are just reaching out. They named it after the rope that hung out of Rahab's window for the sake of bringing these men to safety. Very fruitful ministry. It has been overseen by, and I think some development has come from, Youth With A Mission over the years. But it was named after this story.

So, "When we come back." That's what the word to her was. "When we come back, you be sure your family is all in your house. It's the only place you can be safe. Outside you're not safe because God's judgment is falling." It's kind of an interesting picture, isn't it, this scarlet cord, this blood which covers us, the sacrifice. We use that term "under the blood." "Under the blood" we're safe, aren't we? When God's wrath comes, we're good. We're "under the blood." He's mine. 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Romans 5:9; both of them are 5:9. We've been delivered from the wrath of God.

So, she is off to do something interesting. She's got to go spread the good news to her family without letting everyone around them know that this is what's going on. So often I think we come to church, and we hear God's Word, and we're called to

think about it, and God moves on our hearts, but then we've got to take action. We've got to go out and get people in. "Come on in, man! Join us. The water's fine." Faith has to lead to actions. James, in chapter 2, spent ten verses or so saying, "Show me your faith without your works, I'll show you my faith by my works." And you can only imagine how much talking she might have had to do to convince her family that this was the right way to go. Or, "Oh, you're nuts." "No, really. I met with these men. I know this is what's going on." Rahab got to work by faith.

She wasn't sure when the LORD would return, so we are told in verse 21, "Then she said, 'According to your words, amen,' " which is exactly what the word "so be it" is. "And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window. They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned. The pursuers sought them all along the way, but did not find them. So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. And they said to Joshua, 'Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us.' " I don't know, but she had no idea how long this was going to take any more than we don't know when the Lord is coming. But she got to doing what she was supposed to do right away. "Let me mark out the place, let me hang that scarlet cord out the window, let me gather my family." And they begin waiting by faith. This isn't some emotional response that wore off in a few days. This was a heart that she truly believed God and those He had sent to her, and she was going to wait. Now I don't know how long she had to wait. If we just use the Bible, she didn't have to wait very long. In a matter of days.....there's a week of marching, but.....in a matter of days - and I think even then she knew they were coming, she could just look out the window - pretty interesting.

Now, what the spies and Joshua did not know yet was the manner in which God was going to deliver Jericho. Well, you know the story. But they didn't. And we know, because we've read ahead, that it's going to be that the walls of the city - and it's a huge, powerful city - were going to fall inward. There was going to be an inward collapse just so that God would demonstrate to the children of Israel who they served and who was with them. And Rahab, according to verse 15, lived on the wall. Notice it says "her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall." That's a bummer. "Yeah, we're going to spare you. Oh, by the way, we're knocking the wall down." So, you have to believe that, as the wall fell down, her portion stayed up.

Right? And the same minute these men were let down, they were probably let out. Archaeologists say, and I have no idea how to prove it or disprove it, that in the average city, from what they can tell from archaeological findings, the average apartment or housing on the wall was thirty feet off the ground. I don't know. But that's high enough for me to be worried about it, especially when everything starts to fall around you; and yet God has made you a promise. So we can only assume that portion of the wall stood up as a testimony to her faith. And while the judgment of God fell all around her, it didn't touch her. I'm always reminded of Psalm 91:7 where it says, "A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked." But God's going to protect you. And imagine Rahab and her family just, "There's no wall! And here we are, and here comes the invading army of the LORD" after a week of marching; and now the shouting and the trumpets, and yet they were fine. God honored her very weak but absolutely very real faith. And I think that's important to realize. It's weak faith in the sense that she has very little to go on. Her response was fairly worldly in many ways. She lied to the king, and she made a deal with the spies. "I'll get you out, you get me out. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." But it was driven by the understanding that she had of who God was, and God was impressed with her faith. Not deep faith, not theologically-correct faith, not mountain-moving understanding. She was just a simple woman who had been hunting for truth and found it, even as the LORD promises to make Himself known. And God honored her faith, even in Hebrews, when He wrote, "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace." The word from the Lord, in Hebrews 11:31, is she was one of those who did believe. The opposition - the ones who didn't believe in God - they perished. But she believed in God. So whatever we read of her here, and it's a short little chapter, but what we are given is that God saw what she did and how she felt as being someone who would stand with those who believed, not with those who would not.

It's kind of weird to put the word "harlot" next to faith. It's like an oxymoron, like airplane food. It's really not food. (Laughing) But it's consistent with God's character to take those who have been discarded by the world and make the most of them. Someone who the world looks down at, He makes a vessel of honor. And I would say to you if God can receive Rahab in all of her weakness and change her and use her, He can do the same with you. I don't know where you've been, how far you've fallen, how much you've given up, how far removed you think you are from where God wants you to be. It doesn't hardly matter. He took Rahab up (with very

little information) and made the most out of her life; brought salvation to an entire household through her life, brought salvation to His people by using this woman who was willing to be used.

When Jesus was dining in Levi's house, there in Mark 2, it said that many of the tax collectors and sinners sat together with Jesus at the table, and they were following Him and His disciples. And when the religious folks - when the scribes and the Pharisees - saw Him, there in Levi's house, eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to the disciples, "How is it that He would eat and drink with people like this? How is it He would even bother to be available to folks like this?" And it just made them so curious, these religious folks. It was a complaint of the religious enemies of Jesus. Jesus, in Matthew 21:31, said to them, "I'm going to tell you something. Tax collectors and harlots are going to get into the kingdom of God well before you." He said that to the religious guys. "Here's a tax collector, here's a prostitute. They've got a way head start on you, getting into God's kingdom." But if you go back to that Mark story in verse 17 of chapter 2, Jesus, when He heard their complaining to the disciples about Him, turned and said to these men, "Those who are well don't need a doctor, but those who are sick do. I've come to call not the righteous but the sinners to repentance." And God takes the worst, and He makes the best out of them.

Rahab is one of five women found in the genealogy of Joseph found in Matthew 1 - the husband of Mary. Four of them are named. Bathsheba is not named, but she is referred to as Uriah's wife. But there was that Tamar woman in Genesis 38 who married every one of Judah's sons, I think - Er and Onan and Shelah. Rahab, who we read about here. Ruth - virtuous woman, right? You'd want her in your genealogy except she was a Moabite, and the problem with Moabites was God had already declared that to the tenth generation no Moabite was getting in. She came from a cursed people who had no logical sense or hope of surviving it with God until she met the grace of God and the mercy of God and the goodness of God. Deuteronomy 23 talks about that. So here's Ruth in Jesus' lineage. Bathsheba, referred to as Uriah's wife, committed adultery with King David; not exactly someone you might want to brag about at the family picnic. But there she is. Maybe she had her hand forced by this King who wouldn't give her a choice. I don't know. And then Mary, the faithful woman God chose to bear His only begotten Son. As a Hebrew, putting women in your genealogy was not acceptable. Women didn't have that place. Putting prostitutes in it was even worse! It's like the uncle nobody wants to admit is your uncle. You know? Jesus had a bunch of those in His

lineage because He has this book of "Most Unlikely to Succeed." And even in His genealogy, you see that Jesus didn't exclude anyone. Sin can be forgiven. God loves all sinners - the Jew, the Gentile, it doesn't matter to Him. You come to Jesus, and you have life.

And the lesson of Rahab is that the demonstration of the gospel can reach anyone. We worry sometimes, "Oh, I don't know if they're going to come." Look, Rahab had little to go on. I always am so encouraged that she came to know God with such a little bit of information. I suspect most of us would have went, "Yeah, I'm not sure all that adds up. After all, those guys are outside living in tents, and we've got this big walled city, and we've been here forever, and they just showed up late. And they look like shepherds, and we've got a big army. I'm pretty sure they're going to lose." We might have come to that conclusion. Rahab came to exactly the opposite one. She had a hungry heart. God made Himself known to her. And it wasn't subjective faith; it was faith based on objective truth revealed to her by God. Salvation works that way, doesn't it? That's how people come to know the Lord.

In the church people will come, and we've had it happen more than once, like on a Sunday morning - one of the services, and someone will come up and go, "I want to give my life to Jesus." And you go, "Ah, it's so good!" and you pray with them, and you share with them. And the next guy comes up - same service - and goes, "That was the most horrible sermon I've ever heard. I'll never come back." All right. They don't usually say it that way, but they let you know they didn't like it. Same service! I wonder if they weren't sitting in the same pew. And yet one walks away with eternal life, and the other walks away shaking his head, vowing never to return. And it all depends on perspective, the condition of the heart.

What Rahab heard, everyone had heard. She was able to get her family around, but it seems like no one else really showed up. Her heart was touched, her mind was moved, her emotions were moved, her will caused her to act. She knew little but moved much, and she soon learned much more. And God would spare her. What a great story, you know? You get into the land - here's the land of grace and mercy - and the first person you run into is someone totally set apart by the world, and God said, "Let Me just use her. Seems like the best candidate." Pretty cool story, don't you think?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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