

Mount Olive Baptist

The Faith of Rahab • Joshua 2:1-15 •

MAIN POINT

God loves us regardless of our works, and our faith in Him results in good works.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Would you or those around you think about your testimony of becoming a Christian as dramatic? Why or why not?

If not, have you ever known someone who you thought had a particularly dramatic story of coming to Christ?

What do all these stories, whether dramatic or not, have in common?

Whether we grew up in church or not, each of our stories of salvation is dramatic in its own way. One of the things this helps us see is that no one is beyond the reach of God's love. That was the case with Rahab the prostitute, whose story reminds us God's love extends beyond our goodness.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 2:1,8-13.

Why did Joshua dispatch two men to the city of Jericho?

What did the scouts discover concerning the people in the land?

The spies sought to determine the conditions of Jericho's surroundings. Rahab's words were quite valuable to the success of their mission. Not only were Rahab's words valuable to the spies; they were also valuable to her survival.

How did Rahab's words demonstrate a change in her belief about the God of Israel?

How do her words reflect the core of our Christian faith?

In what ways might Rahab's expression of her faith in words have helped her act on that faith?

Rahab proclaimed who God is, what He has done, and His authority on behalf of His people. These are powerful statements coming from a foreigner! She declared that since the Lord God of Israel had done these mighty works, He must be the true God, Maker of heaven and earth. God must have chosen the Israelites to be His special people. Rahab's statement of faith in 2:9a and 2:11b is a concise summary of the entire Old Testament message of faith. The one, true God was in a holy covenant with the people of Israel.

We see in these verses the essential elements of saving faith. Like Rahab, Christians demonstrate courageous faith when they respond to challenging situations by verbally expressing their trust in God. This verbal expression leads to an active faith through obedience.

| Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 2:6,14-15.

What specific actions did Rahab perform in these verses that demonstrated her faith?

How can we demonstrate our faith through actions that show our trust in God?

Why does faith need to be more than thinking something is true, but acting on it?

Rahab showed her faith by helping the men climb down the outside of the city wall by a rope. In this act, Rahab not only showed faith in God but also that she trusted the two men. They could have easily broken their promise to her. When Rahab joined herself to God's people, she did so fully. True faith in action is obedience. We show courage when we respond to challenging situations by demonstrating our faith by our actions. Rahab's life situation wasn't ideal, but she didn't let that stop her from acting in faith.

Read Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25. Discuss the implication made about Rahab in these New Testament passages. What was the outcome of Rahab's faith expressed in action?

Hebrews 11:31 points to Rahab as an example of heroic faith. In addition, James 2:25 makes the important point that Rahab's actions demonstrated the reality of her faith. She not only expressed her faith in God verbally, she acted in ways that demonstrated her faith in God was genuine.

| Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 6:22-25.

Joshua 6:1-21 describes the amazing fall and destruction of the city of Jericho. What follows is the fulfillment of the two Israelite scouts' promise to Rahab. Joshua ordered those same two men to go to the prostitute's house and bring the woman out of there, along with all who were with her.

What had the spies promised Rahab (2:14)?

What saved Rahab and her family?

Read Matthew 1:5. What do you learn about Rahab in this passage?

The spies promised Rahab a return of kindness and faithfulness for remaining silent. Not only did Rahab's faith bring her and her family members deliverance, but it also gave her a whole new identity. In the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, we can celebrate that Rahab's faith enabled her to become the great-great-grandmother of King David, making her one of the few women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

The Lord rewards eternally and often temporally those who place their faith in Him. However, faith in pursuit of reward is not faith. Faith believes that God is who He says He is. Faith believes in what He has done and recognizes His authority. The greater reward is to be known as one who has walked by faith.

Is it more difficult for you to express your faith in words or in actions? Why?

Rahab's story can encourage our own faith, whatever our difficult circumstances.

How is this story personally encouraging to you?

Often, faith expressed in action motivates others to act in faithfulness. Can you think of an example of how someone else's faith in action motivated you to move forward in faith?

In what situations do you need to express faith this week, both verbally and in action?

How can our group pray for you toward that end?

PRAYER

Pray specifically for situations your group mentioned in which they need to demonstrate faith.

COMMENTARY

| Joshua 2:1-15; 6:22-23

2:1. Joshua had instructed the Israelites to get provisions ready for making their entry into the promised land (see Josh. 1:11). Their preparation and movements would surely be noticed by the inhabitants of Canaan. Joshua's initial strategy did not involve stealth and surprise but rather the presence of overwhelming numbers and confidence in the promises of God. The men Joshua dispatched were to scout the land—that is, the immediate area—as fully as possible, but they were to focus especially on the fortified city of Jericho. He wanted to know about the surrounding terrain, the condition of the city, the morale of its inhabitants, and perhaps also the presence of enemy reinforcement troops in the area.

Reading verse 1, we are struck by the sparse details describing the scouts' entry into Jericho. They left the Israelite camp and immediately came to be in the house of a woman, a prostitute named Rahab. Two items deserve closer reflection. First, we as readers aren't given any explanation or comment regarding Rahab's being a prostitute. We aren't told how or why she came to be a prostitute. Second, we aren't told how or why the Israelite men found themselves in her house and stayed there.

2:6. Rahab hid the Israelite scouts on her roof under some harvested flax until the authorities were gone. This act was an expression of her new faith in two ways. First, protecting the spies meant that she had cast her lot with the Israelites and their God. She in effect had become an enemy of Jericho and joined the other side. Second, hiding the men was simply a brave thing to do. Beneath the flax stalks on her roof proved to be a good hiding place, yet it was no sure thing. If Rahab had been found to be concealing enemy combatants, she would have been deemed a traitor and her life would have been forfeited.

2:8. The presence of the Israelite scouts in Rahab's house didn't go unnoticed by others. When a delegation from Jericho's king appeared at the house and demanded that she turn over the men, Rahab sent the patrol on a wild goose chase, enabling the scouts to wait until the coast was clear before they returned to the Israelite camp.

The phrase before the spies lay down for the night suggests a time late in the day—well after nightfall in fact. Rahab wanted to be sure that all was quiet and dark. That would give the Israelite men, who were hiding on the roof of her house, the best opportunity of slipping away unseen.

2:9-11. These verses contain Rahab's remarkable confession of faith in Israel's God. The confession included the message she had heard, how her fellow citizens had responded, and what she had come to believe about the people of Israel and their God. Since the Lord God of Israel had done these mighty works, He must be the true God, Maker of heaven and earth. God must have chosen the Israelites to be His special people. Rahab's statement of faith in 2:9a and 2:11b is a concise summary of the entire Old Testament message of faith. The one, true God was in a holy covenant with the people of Israel.

2:12-13. As a demonstration of her awakening of faith, Rahab sought salvation for herself and her family. In this context, salvation primarily meant their being spared from the literal destruction that was about to come on Jericho ("save us from death"). Even so, we see in these verses the essential elements of saving faith. First, Rahab heard the story of God's mighty works and did not join in the popular hostility toward God and His work. Second, she turned from unbelief and believed in the one, true God and in His holy covenant. Finally, she sought for kindness—that is, for mercy and deliverance.

2:14-15. Because Rahab hid the Israelite scouts and refused to betray them, the two men promised to show kindness and faithfulness to her and her family when the city of Jericho was destroyed. They made a bold pledge—"our lives for yours"—based on the condition that Rahab would maintain secrecy about their mission. Rahab again showed her faith by helping the men climb down the outside of the city wall by a rope. Late in the evening, the city gate would have been closed. Moreover, the men knew they were being sought and thus couldn't risk walking openly in the streets. In this act, Rahab not only showed faith in God but also that she trusted the two men. They could have easily broken their promise to her. When Rahab joined herself to God's people, she did so fully.

6:22-25. Joshua 6:1-21 describes the amazing fall and destruction of the city of Jericho. It is a story that many Christians learned as children. Joshua ordered those same two men to "go to the prostitute's house and bring the woman out of there, and all who are with her." The Israelite commander gave no hint that he thought the scouts were wrong to make such a promise. He did not begrudge having to show mercy to her even though the Lord had commanded the Israelites to destroy all the Canaanites and to make no alliances with them (see Deut. 20:17). Rahab and her family were the exception that proves the rule. That is, Rahab was similar in this respect to a Canaanite woman of New Testament times who begged Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter (see Matt. 15:21-28). When Jesus declared that His ministry at that time was to the house of Israel, the woman persisted in her pleading. Jesus was moved by the woman's great faith and healed her daughter. These two Canaanite women, separated by centuries of time, both acted boldly in seeking God's mercy for their family members.

The two scouts brought out Rahab and her father, mother, brothers, and all who belonged to her. Being a prostitute, Rahab was unmarried. Thus her family consisted of her father's household. This account truly reveals the transforming power of faith in God. Despite her sinful past, Rahab cared a great deal for her family and sought their deliverance as well as her own. At least for a time, Rahab's family was stationed outside the camp of Israel. Perhaps this was because the family had not directly participated in what Rahab had done and did not yet share her faith in Israel's God. On the other hand, Rahab was most definitely integrated into the covenant community.

The entire city was put to the torch, except for the articles that had been mentioned in v. 19, the valuables that were saved for the Lord's sanctuary: the articles of silver, gold, bronze, and iron (v. 24). Rahab and her family and extended household were spared because of what she did for the spies, and, the author tells us, she still lived there until the day that he wrote those words (v. 25). The point of the verse is not to date the writing of the book, but rather to indicate something of the lasting effects of the agreement the two spies had made with Rahab: it was a binding agreement, one that Israel honored, because of Rahab's faith.