

The God Who is Merciful

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I'd like us to turn back to the book of Joshua. We're going to look at this chapter this evening. It's a great chapter. And Calum introduced the series last week by reminding us of what God was doing among this people.

And we're going to look at this individual account of the life of, or an event in the life of Rahab.

And it's an Old Testament story, isn't it? And we see God at work in history. And that's part of the reason we have the Old Testament, because it's God's story, history is His story.

And He is revealing His character and His work. And the people He was working through in history, right through until Jesus, and then we look back at the work of Jesus.

So Genesis to Revelation is a progressive and unfolding revelation of the character of God and of the need of humanity, and speaks to us about who we are in this world and who we are in this universe.

[1 : 1 2] And it speaks to us about His plans for us, His purposes, and His promises. So the Old Testament's really good. It's quite difficult sometimes, but it's really good.

This is a great chapter, compared with the one that they gave me for this morning in Bellevue, which was Isaiah chapter 11, which was a belter. And I had to leave some of it out, because I didn't really know the answer to some of the things in it.

But this is easier than some of the passages in the Old Testament. But we need to remember when we come to the Old Testament that it's real.

And what happened here happened in history. It was 1400 years ago, 1400 years before Jesus was born in the ancient Near East.

And we need to remember when we look at these stories, that these were very different days to the days in which we live, you know, culturally, morally, and spiritually.

[2 : 0 6] Well maybe not so much morally, but certainly culturally and spiritually. These were different days. It's easy for us to carelessly impose a 21st century mindset onto this account.

But that really sometimes isn't very helpful. We need to remember that at this time of history, they had a limited revelation of who God was.

They didn't have Jesus, and they didn't have the full Bible that we have, and it helps us to understand God and His work more clearly.

But it speaks in shadows. The Old Testament speaks in shadows primarily about rescue and about renewal of people. It's about God and it's about faith.

Now that's great tonight, isn't it? Because we can... we're all interested in God, and I hope we are as believers, and we're all people. So there's a link immediately for us to this Old Testament story, because God hasn't changed.

[3 : 06] And actually people don't change very much either, even though culture and circumstances do. And we can apply these shadows that we see here more clearly and more fully with the benefit of hindsight, as it were, with the benefit of knowing about Jesus and knowing about faith from the New Testament.

So what we'll do, we'll hope to let the Bible explain itself. It's God's Word. God has placed this account here for us, and we look to hear what God sent us tonight.

So every time we look at the Bible, every time we read the Bible, what's very important for us as believers is to remember that this is God's living Word. As if God's speaking to us through it.

That it's not just a history, it's not just a kind of Old Testament account that maybe we don't understand. God has given us this, and He wants us to hear... it's much easier to read a passage like this when we hear a living God speaking through it, isn't it?

Much easier. So let us... well, remember that as we're going through it. And I'm going to ask the question in the first place, why is the story of Rahab included here? This is an account, Josh's account.

[4 : 14] There's a lot of difficult things in the Book of Josh, but it's an account of them entering the Promised Land. It's a Book of Judgment and Salvation. It's a Book of promises being fulfilled that the people... God's people who'd been rescued from Egypt and who'd be wandering in the desert for 40 years now had come to that place where they were going to inherit the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey, and the Book of Joshua is about His leadership as they entered and took over various cities and areas in the Promised Land.

Why is this story of Rahab included? Well, I think because God's big picture, which is in Joshua, is about real people.

And it's about real people who are redeemed from judgment, from the justice of God and God's hand of judgment against them. So the big picture is about judgment from salvation, or salvation through judgment, but also the individual pictures say the same thing.

She is integrally woven into God's story. You know, this isn't a history of the world part one kind of book.

This isn't telling us just the history of the world. This is telling us God's story, and God's story is the greatest story. It's the greatest story. And it's the greatest story because He involves individual people in it.

[5 : 40] And that's great for us, and it's great for us to remember that as Christians tonight, we are in God's story. We are actually in Christ... we are united to Christ. So all that we attribute to Christ, we can recognize that we are part of, if we are believers and have put our faith in Him, we are integrally woven into God's story.

You may feel insignificant. You may feel your life is not particularly significant at a wider level, but it's great to remember that as Christians from before the beginning of the world, His plan involves your name and my name and Rahab's name.

It's not great. When things seem to be maybe just getting away from us in our lives, we are involved in God's story.

And He includes Rachel because it helps us connect truth to real life. You may think, why are the conquest of Canaan? I'm not really terribly interested in that. It doesn't have any real powerful impact on my day-to-day living, but reading about Rachel helps us to see God, not just with a great God with great purposes, but a God who is working very closely in real lives.

And we will go from this place needing to know that comfort and strength of God at work in our lives. And it's included because, well, God put it there. He chose it there.

[7 : 04] It's important simply because He chose to put this story of Rachel in the Old Testament. So when I just go through the story of Rachel, let me just look at the story of Rachel this evening for a few minutes as well and then apply it, some of the principles within to our own lives.

It's a great story, isn't it? So the spies were sent out. Joshua sent out the spies to check out Jericho and the land and come back.

Just to give reassurance, God had promised they would take the land, but nonetheless, He sent out the spies and it was fine for Him to do that. And they arrived in Jericho and they went, we presume, pretty immediately to Rahab's house, the prostitute's house.

Now there's no suggestion whatsoever that they went to get some sexual favours there. Rather it would seem to be a good place for them to go. A lot of people coming in and out of the prostitute's house and a lot of men coming in and out of the prostitute's house.

And it would be common for travellers to go and make use of the hospitality in that home, in that house. They may have thought they would be less noticed.

[8 : 15] They may have also thought it was a good place to find all the gossip that was happening in Jericho. They don't seem to have been very good spies though, because pretty soon everyone knows that they're there and goes right up to the king and he finds out.

So whatever they tried to do by subterfuge didn't really seem to work terribly well. So nonetheless, they were there and Rahab took them in and she was aware of the danger of kind of collaborating with them in any way.

There was great suspicion and fear in the city and she knew that if they were caught in her place that that would be the end of the story for her.

I'm sure there's many unrecorded conversations from this. It would be great to know a little bit more, very sketchy details that we have. But what we do know is that in the midst of all the conversations, she records an amazing testimony from verse 8 through to verse 13.

She explains exactly what she thinks. She says, look, I want to be on the side of your God. We have heard what's happened.

[9 : 29] We know what's happening. We know that God has given this city into His hands, to your hands. And she said, your God is the God of heaven above and on the earth beneath.

And it's a tremendously powerful testimony of faith that she gives here. She confesses the God of Israel as the living and the only true God.

And she pleaded for, she asks that they deal kindly with her. That's a great, that's a great Old Testament. It was one of the great Old Testament words. It's the last word that the translators of the authorised version translated because it was so difficult to translate into English.

It's called Heised. And the authorised version translated it as loving kindness, a very powerful, deep word. And it speaks about mercy, God's mercy. She's pleading for mercy to be shown to her.

And she pleads for a sure word, swear to me by the Lord that you would deal kindly and give me a sure sign. And that's another great, it's actually a great covenant Old Testament word.

[10 : 35] And it's a word for faithfulness and for truth. And she's really, she's actually using covenantal language here. The Old Testament people of God's kind of language. She's saying, you know, show me your faithfulness and show me loving kindness from your God by protecting me and saving me and taking me from this destruction.

And as she gives this testimony, can you imagine being the two spies hearing that? It must have been remarkable for them hearing such faith coming from the home and the mouth of a prostitute that they'd gone to hide with.

Not only her faith, but also as she reveals the fear and dread of the people. It must have been given them a great encouragement that God indeed was going to give that city to them.

And those purposes are unfolding as to why He let the spies, or why He asked, Joshua asked the spies to go there to give them assurance and to connect them with rehab in whose heart God was working.

That's great. God was working in rehab's heart. He had a purpose for her and the spies were sent and we see God's plan unfolding in her personal life here.

[11 : 52] And she was making a very real choice against all the odds basically here. It was, I'm going to put my lot in with God's people and with God and with God's people or, and I'm turning my back on the city of Jericho.

A city she'd been integrally part of, she knew a lot of the people in that city because she was a prostitute. She would have been poor.

She would have had a sense, I think, of worthlessness in that city. It wasn't a glamorous career that she was involved in, the immorality of that city was very, very powerful.

She was a sex object to be used and abused. Those that lived on the city wall, as she did, were the poorest. They were the ones that were most likely to be killed in any attack on the city.

But she recognized there was no future for her here. It was a waste of time. Nobody cared for her. And her life was just going nowhere. And it was unsatisfying and unfulfilling.

[12 : 56] And she heard about this great God, this great God of the people of Israel. And she put in her lot with them.

Now that choice for her involved great risk and also positive action. You know, if she was found out, because she had to remain in the city, remember, when the spies left, she had to remain there.

If she found out, she would undoubtedly have been killed. She was putting all her eggs into one amazing basket. And in doing so, that even involved lying.

So she lied to the guys that came round from the king and told them that the spies weren't there. That lying is not right, but the Bible doesn't say anything.

It doesn't make any condemnation about her. It doesn't judge one way or another. It just records that that's what she did. Now, lots of debate and lots of words have been written about what she did, was she right, was it wrong, how can God condone lying and all these things.

[14 : 01] The Bible says nothing about it. Not here and not in the New Testament. No word does it mention anything. Now that is not to condone what she did, but it's to recognize the reality of the situation and who she was and where she was coming from.

She put her trust in the spies. She was given faith to know that the God of the spies was faithful. She had to put a scarlet cord out the window and she had to bring all her family into the house.

These are interesting things. Before that, I will mention a little bit more about that in a while. So that's the story that we have in this chapter.

I want to do two more things. One, I want to take a slightly wider look in the Bible at this and also at similar stories, very briefly, and then apply it to our lives.

This is similar to the other. Remember previously, twelve spies were sent out and ten of the twelve spies said, oh no, there are giants in that country.

[15 : 07] We can't take it. The only two spies who were faithful to God in His promises were Caleb and Joshua. And this time the spies recognized that God had given the land to them and they put their faith in God, not their circumstances.

Now that's an interesting one for us. Are we like the ten spies or are we like the two spies here? Do we just look at all our circumstances and think, oh, it's terrible. We can't go forward.

God isn't on our side. Or do we look at the character and nature of God and trust in Him? Then we have the story of the Passover in Exodus where the blood had to be put on the lentils, remember, so the angel of death would pass over.

Now there is a similarity between that and between the scarlet cord. Speaking of mercy in the place of judgment now, I'm not saying that the scarlet cord necessarily represents blood or the word scarlet is never used in that context in the Bible.

But nonetheless, it clearly speaks of a sign and a symbol and a focus which meant that judgment wouldn't happen in that instance.

[16 : 23] And it does therefore at that level at least point forward to Jesus and to the reality of Jesus covering us and protecting us.

But what's also interesting is her character because there's another instance when judgment is coming to a city, isn't there, in the Old Testament? And there's another instance when there's two people of faith within that city.

Do you remember that? There's Rahab here with Jericho and there's also Lot, the story of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now the same thing happens is that Lot's concerned for his family and friends as is Rahab. But do you notice the difference between the two?

Lot's family laughed at him. Don't be ridiculous. We're going to celebrate, we're fine, couple angels have come, that's no problem. They're going to go in the morning.

[17 : 22] Nothing will happen to a city. And they laughed at him. They didn't respect him. His life wasn't weighty enough for them to move and act in safety towards what was being said.

But Rahab was very different. To me that suggests that she had been a believer for maybe some time, at least whatever it was and you would think Lot's supposed to be an upstanding man and Rahab a prostitute.

You'd think it'd be the other way around, wouldn't you? By our standards, sometimes, or the way we judge. But Rahab's family and all the people, you know, she's almost acting like a covenant head for them and all of them respond because there was something courageous and weighty about her life.

She influenced other people positively who knew her. That's a great witness and it's a great testimony to us. Do you think people think that about our lives?

If we were to tell them about Jesus and the gospel, do they just laugh at us? Now, sometimes they'll laugh at us and it's got nothing to do with our character, but sometimes they might laugh at us because just we don't live the way that reflects that it's real and honest and important.

[18 : 51] So we see these links and there's also the link really just generally in Rahab's place in the Bible because she's an example basically of what faith is.

It's not the righteous that Jesus has come to save but sinners and that's who he rescues. And that's what God's saying here. She is the last person in the world you would think would be saved here.

She's an amirite and God says the sin of the amirites was full, they were going to be destroyed. She's a prostitute, she's a Gentile, she's not part of God's family and she's living in a city of unimaginable evil and brutality.

She's a sex object within that city. She had no security yet her faith and her name is recorded for posterity forever. And she has a new history as she puts her lot in with God and follows God.

She becomes the mother-in-law of Ruth, the great, great granny of David and she marries a prince in Judah and she's among the five names, five women recorded in the genealogy of Jesus.

[19 : 54] That's not a great story that is for a prostitute from Jericho, 1500 years before Jesus. And there's something really powerful in the names that are recorded in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew of the women that are named.

There's Tamar, there's Rahab, there's Ruth, there's Bathsheba and there's Mary. All regarded as outsiders, some with a dubious history morally and ethically, but all of them who we can say are poor in spirit but are rich in faith.

And it's just such a brilliant inversion of what we think sometimes that God should accept. Wonderful. And these are woven into His blood.

They're part of His genealogy. Isn't that great that He has brought these people and sealed them and bonded them in His genealogy because He says, these are, this is the kind of people I've come to save, those who, whatever background, rich or poor, upright, according to the world or not, but who recognize their poor in spirit and who need Jesus Christ.

And that is a great example of faith for you and me this evening because her faith, as we take the broader picture, her faith is held up as an example in the New Testament.

[21 : 23] Two places in Hebrews 1 and 31 and also in James 2 and verse 25. And James particularly, the emphasis on her works that justified her faith.

And she is remembered in the great hall of fame of faith in Hebrews 11 as one who revealed and showed great faith.

And so, you know, doesn't mention anything but a lie. Either of these particular instances in the New Testament. Trust and obey. Faith changed her and it changed her life.

And that example of faith is still holds true for us, that faith changes us and is evidenced by our obedience. If you love me, Jesus, if you love me, He says, you will obey my commands.

You will obey what He asks us to do, which helps us to love Him and love our neighbor, vertical and horizontal. That's a great outworking of the law.

[22 : 24] And Rahab is a great example of that in all the shadows of the Old Testament for us, applied by God Himself in the New Testament.

So can I finish just with applying this, trying to apply it a little bit more to our own lives? Because there are principles here and the shadows of the Old Testament are brought under New Testament light.

And I just want to say two things because it speaks about our God and it also speaks about our faith. There is a passage about the importance of faith in Jesus Christ, trusting in our Redeemer and our Savior.

First thing about God is He matters, okay? God matters because His Word that's revealed here and throughout Scripture, in judgment and mercy is true.

You know, Calvary, Calvary is the visual representation of the truth of God's Word in judgment and in mercy.

[23 : 25] And that never changes and He doesn't lie. He is a just God and we are unjust sinners. And the only place that we can get forgiveness is when He Himself in all His mercy takes our sin on Himself.

We are all accountable to God and we want to be accountable to Him covered in the righteousness of Jesus. Our only hope is trusting in what Jesus has done for us.

So your life, your choices tomorrow all will have consequences. What you choose to do, how you choose to live, the path you take as a Christian tomorrow or tonight or today or what you did last week.

Because of consequences, because we have to live and recognize that we are responsible as Christians. We've been given the Holy Spirit and there's a prayer ceiling a deal there.

[24 : 25] And sometimes it always matters how we live. It always matters how we live.

And God matters and His incredible love for us should drive us towards it. What are you doing with His love? What are we doing with His love? Are we walking away from it?

Are we treating it casually or do we recognize if we love Him, if we have come to Him in faith we will obey what He says.

So God matters and He uses shock tactics to expose our hearts. I've kind of touched on this already.

Quite a long time ago I had the graveyard slot at a church planting conference in Edinburgh, probably about 10 or 12 years ago. I'm not sure, it was quite a long time ago. And it was a kind of pastoral slot after lunch when everyone was digesting their lunch and they were all falling asleep.

[25 : 23] And I was to speak on, I was asked to speak on Legion. And someone 10 years later said to me, I remember that because you said we are Legion.

And so tonight I'm saying again, but what I'm saying is we are Rahab. And He uses shock tactics to remind us of that, that we are all Rahab.

Because our moral compass often judges others and protects ourselves. But very often we are the ones who have prostituted ourselves and abused God and His love by metaphorically sleeping with idols, with metaphorically putting others in the place of God and not recognizing faithfulness and loyalty to Him.

And He's saying, and He's reminding us here that faith helps us to see that it's not how others view you either positively or negatively, or even how you view yourself and how I view myself.

God says, it's how I view you that really matters. And He's saying we are all Rahabs by nature. We're all alienated from God. Our identity is torn to bits.

[26 : 37] We're broken and dying. And we have only one hope, the same hope that was Rahabs trusting in the living God and knowing and coming to know His shalom, His peace.

The truth needs to bring that light into our hearts that we are all Rahab.

You need that if you're not a believer this evening, to know that you need redemption. And as new Christians and as old, mature Christians, we never get beyond that.

The daily need to repent, to see as God sees, and to trust in Him for a hope and a future. So God, He matters.

He uses shock tactics and He reminds us that people matter. I love the story of Rahab because it reminds us that no one's beyond redemption, humanly speaking, as we look at maybe her life.

[27 : 36] And we need to recapture that for the people we know and love who don't know Jesus, and we make the judgment on them that they will never come to Christ. We need to remember Rahab and start praying again, big prayers for people, for people that maybe are far, far away from the kingdom, and recognize that God is well able.

And He gives us stories like Rahab and also the genealogy of Jesus to remind us that He fills His genealogy with women that were barren, that were old, and men that were useless because He reminds us that it's a miracle of grace and a work of God in people's hearts.

So remember that about God, but also about our faith. It speaks about our faith. Our faith is always based on God's Word and God's work.

That's very important. Joshua went to conquest the land because of what God had promised, and he looked back at the five books of Moses to hear God's Word. That's in itself amazing.

That was the only Bible he had. Rahab heard what God was doing, and she put her trust in Him. So God's Word and God's work, even in the Old Testament shadows, how much more do we have privilege of God's Word and generations of God at work changing people's lives.

[29 : 05] His promises never fail me. Our faith be based on the character and the Word and the work of God. Don't let circumstances or feelings dictate your obedience and service to Jesus.

Base everything. Found your life. Send your roots to the living water all the time. Keep remembering that picture. Send your roots from Jeremiah 17.

And in terms of our faith, what story does our life of faith tell? Because here we have Joshua, and he's dependable and courageous in faith. They've never made a film about Joshua because he's probably too good.

There's not a lot of wildness about him, but he's a great faithful character and new blessing because of that. And here's Rahab, hugely influential on her family.

So different from Lot. She had this great risk and courage of obedience because she saw he was worth it. And we need to ask what story, what kind of story our life is tell?

[30 : 06] What story of faith is our life telling? You know, faith, God tells us it comes from hearing and our feet are beautiful if we are walking and telling and bringing the good news.

Because it's easy to hide just behind being nice or even just being genuine. But is our life a life of courage and obedience?

To whom are our loyalties given? You know, a great gemelli at that great missionary that, you know, maybe some of the older ones know more about than the younger ones.

But he said he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain, what he cannot lose. Courage and the risk of obedience. And we remember it in terms of the character of faith.

We believe against all the odds. Remember that, all the odds of human reasoning. People looked at Jericho with all its fantastic ramparts and army and everything. And this ragtag of guys and girls who had been wandering the desert for 40 years.

[31 : 15] It was only God who put that fear in them and Rahab could see that it was the living God that was behind this people. And we need to remember that in our own lives that we have the living God and we have His mercy in our lives, whatever is happening in this crazy mental world in which we're living.

Who are we listening to? And lastly, faith. The character of faith reminds us that it becomes a new creation. She became a new creation as she trusted and her whole life changed.

She left a life of prostitution and became a significant mother in Israel as it were. And I can imagine her saying, as for me in my house, we will serve the Lord.

But she and Joshua had that same kind of newness within their lives. And we are to always seek and remember, not to be in a rut, we are to seek that newness and that ongoing newness and freshness and vibrancy and growth and development in our faith because that's the great thing about faith.

It doesn't leave us in a rut. And it doesn't say, oh, I've been a Christian 25 years ago and yeah, and that happened a long time ago and I'm just getting on my life now.

[32 : 36] There's this brilliant developmental aspect of faith that means sometimes we take one step back, two steps back and sometimes even three steps back, but then maybe four steps forward at some point.

And we're growing and we're progressing in grace as we repent and believe and trust in the great Jesus who loves us and who from before the beginning of the world has vowed that he will not lose one of those for whom he died.

Remember that and grow in grace and be inspired by rehab. And if you're not a Christian, please consider this one story that permeates the whole of Scripture of which rehab is just a type and example of trust in the living God, the only hope of life and of a future.

And really, you will know transformation and you will know hope unbridled. Keep your roots, keep sending them out and no fruitfulness even in times of drought.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to know you better. We thank you for this brilliant story.

[33 : 51] We thank you that it still resonates with life because it's the living Word of God and it's the story of a living, a person who did live and who died and but who is alive as alive today as they ever were in Christ, rehab.

And we thank you for that great hope that even though we die yet we will live in Christ. What parallels that? What comes near that Lord? Nothing.

Forgive us for the idols that we just ram into our hearts and lives as if anything else can give what Jesus offers and help us, we pray to come to you with a freshness, a recognition of your grace.

However far we might have fallen this week, however difficult our lives have been, however blasphemous we have been, our prostitutes, how we prostitute our relationship with you.

Lord, we thank you that you simply ask us to return and you give us back the years the locusts have eaten. We rejoice in that. We rejoice that you're not like us in these things.

[34 : 56] You don't bear grudges, you don't give us a period of cooling down or warming up or a testing period before you accept us back.

We just ask that we would come with open hearts and open lives to you. Bless this week too us. Bless everyone who's here and may you speak and be with them and encourage them and give them courage and hope, give us all courage and hope to share our faith this week.

And remind us just as you brought the spies to Raham's house, maybe completely unwittingly, but you are working in our heart. May you bring us to people this week in whom you're already working and may we be faithful to share the news of Jesus Christ with them.

Who knows what will happen. Amen.