

Rahab

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[0 : 00] Could you turn back with me tonight to Joshua chapter 2 and to the story that we have of Rahab? There's not much else said about her in the Bible. There's a couple of references to her in other places which I'll mention later on. But this is the main story that we have of Rahab.

And the title to this series is Better Examples. So I've taken women from the Bible, women of faith from the Bible, who God has included in Holy Scripture to look at as examples for our own life of faith. Women have very many pivotal roles in the Bible and at various stages they play hugely significant roles within the Scripture story. And women play a great and significant and important part in the church. And I pay tribute to the women of St. Columbus and the foundational and core and central work that they do in the life of this congregation. This congregation would collapse without the work of the women who do so much within the church.

And we recognize that God has given different roles to men and women, generally in life and within the church. And there is much mystery behind that. They don't have the role of formal spiritual leadership within the church. But men are to be Christlike in their role of leadership, to be servant leaders, to value and to use and to delegate to those who know more than them the work and the witness of the church. And to learn from one another to recognize the specific gifts and talents and usefulness of women in their lives and in their compassion and in their vision and their clarity and their common sense. All these things that we recognize as being so important in the church and we are grateful. And I am really grateful for the women in this church and for the huge amount of work that they do for Christ and for his kingdom. But I'd like this evening to look at Rahab and learn the lessons that we can take from this interesting story, an interesting character that she has.

Sometimes there's bits of the Old Testament that are a challenge to us. And this is, in some ways, no less of one. It's so outside of our kind of understanding, the situation, the everything about it is just not common to us. But nonetheless, we can, we recognize scriptures written into situations, written into people's lives, into different cultures as we saw this morning. And at different times, and God was still revealing himself to us. And what I want to do is just take one or two general lessons from this story and then one or two specific lessons from the example of Rahab for us this evening. I hope that that will be something that we can learn from.

I'm going to use one or two different Bible verses, which I hope the team will be ready just to flick on when I ask for that this morning, this evening, sorry. And the first lesson I want to take from this passage, and these are just general lessons. They are lessons you could take yourself and learn from, but we just reiterate them. And the first is, be careful how you judge people, okay? Be careful. How you judge people in the church and in life in general. Can we have the first text of Matthew chapter 7 verse 2? Do not judge or you too will be judged for in the same way you judge others, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Now that's, I've got longer verses up than that, and I wouldn't be able to see them on that screen. So I may have to turn around and look at them on this screen, because I'm needing a new pair of contact lenses.

[3 : 59] And I don't know what's happened to them. Either my eyesight has gone much worse, or the lenses are past their cell by date. But that verse is from the New Testament, but it can apply to our understanding of this story as well. Because Rahab here, she's a shady lady. Let's not have any doubt about that. She is from a pagan people. She's not part of the people of God. And she's a lady of the night. She's a prostitute. She was probably an innkeeper. It seemed to be that in a lot of these cities, the inn would also be the house of prostitution and the innkeeper would also sell her body for favours. And that is what she was. And Mu'i might ask, when we see that background, is that the raw material for a heroine of the faith? Well, God sees fit to recognise her as such.

She's used here in a very practical way to save the spies that have gone from the people of Israel to spy out the land which God has promised them as an inheritance. She saves their lives. She tells

them about the state, the mental state of the people as the Israelites are coming. She's included, along with a couple of other shady ladies in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, in the line of Jesus Christ that we're giving in Matthew. And she's the only lady that's given some sentences in Hebrews chapter 11, that great roll call of faith. So the Bible sees fit to give her a significant place and to recognise her as someone who has come to a genuine faith. And her background is no barrier to that. And it mustn't be a barrier. And we mustn't judge people. We have to be very careful about how we judge people. Be careful how you judge someone who comes to sit beside you in church. Be careful what you think about them. Be careful before you make judgments about them because you can't see their hearts and I can't see their hearts. Or we might be able to smell them. And we might be able to know a little bit about their background, but we can't see their hearts. So don't judge them. Don't judge people that we see in the street. Don't judge people that we hear about in the newspapers. Don't judge people. And specifically, don't judge people as people of grace ourselves because grace is the great leveler and grace is what reminds us where we've come from and what we've been saved to. And grace is the reminder of our own hearts that God sees us and sees all the ugliness and the brutality and the ugliness of our hearts and still loves us and redeems us and will forgive us as we cry out to him. Please remember that. Don't be quick to judge people. Be very careful to judge people's motives, to judge people's hearts. It's very easy in the church to do that. We're very quick to take sides. We're very quick sometimes to go into camps. Don't judge people quickly. But this is a related point also. Don't be a snob. The second verse please in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Not many of you. This is where Paul's speaking about this. The foundation of the church, again very important for us. Not many of you were rise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. Now, that could be about the innkeeper, Rahab. It could be about the prostitute, couldn't it? [7 : 59] Now, that's who God has chosen. And we'll find very often in Scripture that these great words are words that remind us of the radical nature of the gospel and of the radical nature of God's way.

Because he is a revolutionary and he doesn't dance to our tune. And he'll not fill the church with people that we think he should fill the church with. He'll not fill the kingdom with people that we think he should fill the kingdom with. He's going to fill the kingdom with sinners saved by grace who recognize that. And if you're hoping people will come into the church who are nice and balanced and correct and good and proper and upright and socially acceptable, then that'll not be the case. We'll have an empty church because very often these kind of people don't need a Savior or don't feel they need a Savior. And we need to not be snobbish about that.

Sometimes in the church we've seemed to focus on the intellectually elite or the socially or the culturally elite. That shouldn't be the case. We should be open and we should be Christ-like and we should be somehow reaching out to those who are in the gutters. Because that's who Christ reached out to. That's who... Not exclusively. It's not saying that others don't need redemption, but we mustn't be snobbish in our understanding and Rehab is a great reminder to us of that grace again exposes snobbery, doesn't it? And legalism embraces it. Legalism embraces snobbery. Embraces people who do the right thing outwardly, who act in the right way, who are upright and nice and good and moral. Legalism embraces snobbery. Grace is the great leveler and exposes it. Let us remember that God uses not great talent but great likeness to him, great godliness and that will often come from those who recognize their great need and who have come to a living faith through Jesus Christ.

So that's the second general point I'd like to make. The third point, general point I'd like to make, and you might not have even picked up on this, I don't know. Sometimes ministers bring up points that people haven't even thought of and isn't an issue with them. This is an issue for some people and it's an issue for some people who like to wrestle with things in Scripture. And it is, can I tell you, not missing the point of the story, don't miss the point of the story.

Don't miss the point of this story. Now some people are tempted to miss the point of the story because they get all hung up on the fact that Rehab lied. Now, what did Rehab do? She lied to the Jericho police to tell them that the spies had gone. And now then people get all hung up about, well, okay, was it right to lie? Can you have a white lie or is it wrong to lie? Was she right or wrong? Was it a good or a bad thing? Would she be condemned for that or is it okay so to do?

[11 : 03] Please don't get hung up on this debate because it misses the point. I was reading a commentary about this Dale Ralph Davis and he said it's a bit like a wife who spent a whole day in the house preparing a beautiful banquet for the guests, dinner guests having that evening. She got all in the fridge already and her husband comes home. She takes him over to the fridge and opens the fridge and says, look at that, look at the work I've done and everything that's ready for tonight.

And he just says, the tilt of the fridge is a bit dusty. He could do it being cleaned. She has missed the point, hasn't he? He's missed the whole point of what she's done and what she's been doing and what she's been involved in. She's looking somewhere else, something the wrong place.

And so I think if we're looking at trying to find some kind of theological discussion about her lying here, we're missing the point. Very often in the scripture, scripture just records what happened. It doesn't make a judgment on whether it's right or wrong. Sometimes we don't need to make that judgment.

The New Testament doesn't make the judgment. It just says about Rahab. She was a woman of faith. That's all it says, doesn't make the judgment. If we can say anything about it, maybe we can say she was engaged in the lesser of two evils. Because if she hadn't said what she had said, then they would have been killed. But anyway, let's move on from that. Let's look at one or two lessons from Rahab's faith itself and how we can take these and apply them in our own life of faith, even though our lives are very different and situations and timing, scriptural is very different.

She grasped the first lesson I want to share with you is that she grasped the truth about God. In verses 8 to 13, you have this great recognition of who God is and she speaks about who God is.

[12 : 54] You know, I know that the Lord has given this land to you and I know that he's taken you through the Red Sea and I know that the Lord is your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

And then she says, because of these things, I need his mercy and I'm asking you for his mercy. So she has grasped some very important truths about God, even though she knew very little and she wasn't given very much in her life. She knew that he was an awesome God, that he was to be feared, to be revered. He was a powerful and sovereign God. She knew he was the only God, that he was this great God of the universe, but she also was aware of his mercy, of how he's been a redeeming God, of his being a God who loved people and who took his own people out of slavery and into the promised land. And she was throwing herself upon this God. So she, she grasped the truth about God. That's pretty good insight, isn't it? It's pretty good insight for the lack of real biblical knowledge that she had been given. She'd grasped that he was a great God, that he judged sin, but he was also merciful and she could put her trust in him. Now we're sitting here this evening comfortably, go through another Sunday. We've got the Bible, we've got the finished Bible, we've got the work of Jesus Christ in the cross. I wonder if we see as clearly as she did. Do we recognize this awesome God? Do we believe in an awesome, glorious God, a God who judges sin, but also a God who is great in mercy? Or do we simply love the soft mercy story and have let his greatness go as we live our lives? She grasped the truth about God. But she also acted, didn't she? She acted on her convictions. She was the one who knew about this God. She recognized this God was to be feared and to, to be, not to be messed with and yet who could save her. And so she acted on that by doing what she did, by hiding the men, by telling a lie on their behalf, by letting them down the window and by asking that they come back and redeem her and her family when they came back. Now that was really risky, but she acted on her convictions and it's great. It's a great story. She didn't have much knowledge, but she acted on that knowledge and that's a great thing. We know a lot today, don't we? We've got innumerable numbers of books and internet access to biblical stuff and to stuff about God and we know about his character and we have great theological insight and we have the

Finnish word of God and all these things. But does it in the same way inspire obedience? Her knowledge, little though it was, inspired this act of obedience on God's behalf and we are asked to take our knowledge out of our heads and we are to take that knowledge and let it seep into our hearts and then from our hearts into our hands and into our eyes and into our feet and into our mouth so that we take the knowledge and it transforms what we are into obedient people.

She acted on her convictions and it's a great thing to act on her convictions. What we know about God now is some people, one or two people misunderstood what I said on Wednesday night when we were talking about the church and what we were looked at from the update and the church and the kind of ethos we have as a church and I mentioned, because I've mentioned before, that we are

more about a being church than a doing church and what I meant by that is that we're a people who know God in Christ, that we are in a relationship with them, that it's not just a religious ritual we come along to on Sunday and we go away and we live our lives and then we come back the next Sunday and occasionally we'll read the Bible and once or twice we'll pray and we'll do lots of things for the church. What I'm saying is that we're a being people because we are in a relationship with Jesus Christ and we're in a relationship with one another and from that knowledge and prayer and life stems our activity and stems our obedience and stems what we do.

I don't want us to be so busy with being church or doing church, doing churchy things at your five, six nights out, a week doing church kind of things and having no time to be and to live in a relationship with Christ and to live in a relationship with other people to share Christ with them and to develop relationships. That's really what I meant and that's what is behind this conviction of this woman Rahab. Her convictions triggered her obedience and so our convictions should trigger her, our lives and our obedience to Jesus Christ. Faith without works is dead. James 2 25 that's the next verse that's for the screens. Remember that verse it's a well-known verse in scripture and it might or it might not come up so I'll just keep talking until maybe it does come up if the team have fallen asleep up there they may have done or can it not cut off you forget it I've run out of things to say. James chapter 2 tells us that faith without works is dead.

[18:49] Okay remember that remember oh that is I'm really sorry I see I can't see it I'm busy there thinking that's a really I thought it was faith without works is dead I'm sorry sorry Jessica well it is faith without works is dead but there's a bit about Rahab before it see that in the same way Rahab I even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous what she did when she gave lodging to the spies in Centimah she was considered righteous for what she did for what she did for what she did for her obedience that was based on her convictions faith without works is dead and that's what I meant by being a being Christian is you're being you're in that relationship with Jesus Christ and as such you will then put that into practice in your life okay that's a second lesson is that she acted on her convictions and the third lesson I can't just relate to this is that she showed bravery she showed great bravery because she acted in such a way that put her her life at risk okay we don't have the same problem today our lives aren't at risk when we obeyed the Lord God you know it's soft and easy for us in many ways to be Christians but it's difficult in other ways she was going against the city that she lived in and the people she belonged to to now can I say something very very interesting here well I think it's very interesting everyone was afraid of God in that city Rahab wasn't unique everyone knew about God in that city and indeed that country she says that herself God was the talk of the town in this place everyone knew what was happening everyone knew that God's people were coming and there was a great fear and dread fell upon the people so they were all afraid but the question is who were they more afraid of so the rest of the people were more afraid of their reputation of their friendships of the city they lived in of their nationality and of of going against what was genuinely or generally believed Rahab was more afraid of God a fear that led to reverence to worship and that is at the very core of bravery spiritual bravery so that when you don't stand up for Jesus

Christ in your life tomorrow you ask the question well who am I afraid of and it's always that you're more afraid of people than you are of God you're more afraid of your reputation you're more afraid of being pop of not being popular you're more afraid of being ridiculed than you are of reverencing the God who is God and that's a really helpful thing for us to consider and it's something we all battle with if we're honest fear of man fear of being rejected easier to not be afraid of God because we can't see him and as far as we can tell he's not going to put a bolt of lightning down if we don't stand up for him even though we recognize it as being wrong and the Bible is full of these things these encouragements not to be afraid now I believe you'll be afraid because I'm afraid all the time I'm afraid of not being popular afraid of not being accepted afraid of being ridiculed afraid of not being able to answer people's questions afraid of their arguments afraid of failure afraid of all of these things but if we reverence God then we are able to go to him to take away our fear can I have some of the next verses up please and I'll not give you a hard time I said be strong even in Joshua here you know he was telling his own people be strong and courageous don't be afraid don't be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go so God says don't be afraid because I'm going to be with you can I have a new the next one which is Jesus immediately said to them take courage it is I don't be afraid you know without the story I think it's the story of the storm and

Jesus walking in the water you know take courage don't be afraid it is I and the other one isn't another one from 1st Corinthians 16 be in your guard stand firm in the faith be courageous be strong these are really strong divine promises and encouragements to show bravery in our lives and when we're it's not don't be afraid of being afraid there's nothing wrong with fear we're all afraid but it's what we do with that fear and it's taking it to God and asking God to give us the courage that he promises he will give his people and that he gave to Rahab to take this amazing step that was counterculture counter everything that went against everyone else and yet had such great influence and that brings me to the last point that I want to make which is that her active faith her life of faith as it was to become affected the lives of other people for good if you look at chapter 6 when the Israelites eventually come into Jericho to destroy it and to take it over 6 verse 25 we're told but Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute with her family and all who belong to her because she had the men of Joshua she had to mean Joshua had sent a spouse to Jericho and she lived among and she lives among the Israelites to this day so her active faith and her her choice of faith and the fact that God opened her heart and that she responded to that affected the lives of her friends and family those around her those that she'd influenced over those that she loved wasn't interesting that she didn't just think of herself it would have been a very family oriented society but she asks she asks the the spy she says you look after my family my father my mother and brothers and sisters and all belong to them all who belong to them so she had a wide circle of influence for good because of what she did they were saved we don't know if they became believers presumably probably did but she lived among the Israelites as part of the people of God for the rest of her life and the New Testament in

Hebrews reminds us of her faith it accords to her the the great reality of being a woman of faith recorded in the roll call of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 who lived by faith and not by sight so she affected people's lives for good she was a pagan and she was a prostitute she was possibly an innkeeper she wasn't high and mighty and intelligent intellectually she may have been intelligent but she she wasn't kind of regarded as an intellect and regarded as someone of great significance or moral standing that God used her greatly and God uses people of faith not people of gifts and it's important to remind ourselves of that and it's also important to remind ourselves of the need for courage because when we're taking courageous steps as Christians it will affect other people for good when we fall back in fear and when we're silent or when we don't rely on the spirit and when we're going our own way then it's there can be untold consequences for bad for the people that were influenced by us who don't see the God that promises and who don't see the faith that he gives and who don't see his grace that transforms our lives so you have a circle of influence I don't know how big it is I don't know how big your circle of influence is don't know many people that you influence for good or influence potentially for good or for ill but you're not an island and I'm not an island and our lives our responsive faith affects the people around about us whether it's in school or whether it's in university whether it's in your workplace whether it's in your homes or in your neighborhood or whoever it is Christ wants us not by human standards but he wants us in his strength to be influential and if Rahab the pagan prostitute can be in her day and generation why can't we be with what we have he is gifted us so much we are joined heirs as we saw this morning with Jesus Christ we are part of his kingdom and as we act in obedience and act with courage on what we know and what we've been given and rely on his spirit and his grace in our hearts we can make a great difference spiritually for good and you need to do that here you need not to rely on other people to make the difference you need to make the difference you're the ones with a circle of influence that's significant and important you're the ones who can share Jesus Christ the day-to-day basis you're the ones who need to be being and when you're being on the basis of what you know and what you've experienced of Jesus and you obey him and your courageous then he will bless and affect the lives of others for good when it be terrible to get to the end of our lives and have a roll call of people who have been negatively affected by our life by our maybe people come up to us at the end of our lives and say oh that's amazing I didn't even know you were a Christian and I've known you for 40 years so you never told me about Jesus Christ you never once mentioned how significant he was we've been friends for all these years and you said you love me but you never once told me that I would meet him one day and I would never get into a relationship with him without him taking my sins and I'm now outside of him eternally it's so significant who we rub shoulders with

because as God is the one who is sovereign over all these things he's put you into these places and he wants you to share the great good news of the gospel so may the life of Rahab the life of Rahab

and pagan prostitute the shady lady who's in the roll call of faith may she be the one who inspires us by his spirit to live a better a more courageous and bolder Christian life we'll pray let's pray Lord God help us we pray we thank you for Rahab we thank you for her life we thank you for her witness we thank you for her faith and we thank you that you've chosen to record her in scripture much against what maybe some people would think would be an acceptable witness or example to others role model maybe but Lord we thank you that she's a perfect role model perfect and maybe be those who recognize that in our own lives as we admit and see our own sin and our own need and yet see the great and glorious redemption and forgiveness that God offers us through Jesus and by his grace may we be transformed transforming and transformational in our lives so help us in these things we pray for Jesus sake amen