

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 11-12-17

November 12 we will study Joshua 2. Discussion questions are:

1. Why did God choose Rahab to be in the lineage of His son?
2. What does the faith of Rahab tell you about opportunities the Gentiles had in the Old Testament to learn about God?
3. What did Rahab do that made her such an example of faith?
  - a. How do Heb. 11:31 and James 2:25 characterize Rahab?
  - b. What is the difference in what each of those references is saying about Rahab's faith?
4. In your daily life how have you been called to stand against the culture?
5. What do we learn about God from the story of Rahab?
6. Some folks are unduly concerned about Rahab lying about the presence of the spies in her house.
  - a. Were Rahab and all her family saved because she lied so well? (Heb. 11:31)
  - b. How many of the people listed in Hebrews 11 are specifically recorded in other parts of the Scripture as lying?
    - i. Abraham – Gen 12:13; 20:2
    - ii. Sarah – Gen. 18:9-15
    - iii. Isaac – Gen. 26:7
    - iv. Jacob - Gen. 27:19
    - v. Moses – Ex. 4:18; 5:3
    - vi. Rahab – Josh. 2:4-5
7. What does Rahab's testimony to the spies tell us about her?
8. On what basis did Rahab decide to trust the spies, and their God, with her future?
9. How does it make you feel that God put Rahab, Jephthah, Samson and Gideon in the list of heroes of faith in Heb. 11?

### *Sermon: From A Harlot to A Heroine*

A young teen aged girl had a date with a boy who wore all black clothing, had long stringy, dirty hair, tattoos all over his body and piercings in places that made sneezing a nightmare. Her parents said, "We are concerned about this boy you are going on a date with." She asked why. They said, "We are just afraid he's not very nice." She said, "If he weren't nice would he be doing 5,000 hours of community service?"

We tend to withhold our love from those of whom we do not approve. The amazing thing about God is that he values those whom no one else on earth values. Listen to the words of Joshua 2:

*<sup>1</sup> Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.*

<sup>2</sup> The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land."<sup>3</sup> So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

<sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from."<sup>5</sup> At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them."<sup>6</sup> (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)<sup>7</sup> So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

<sup>8</sup> Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof<sup>9</sup> and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you."<sup>10</sup> 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 Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed."<sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."<sup>12</sup> Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign<sup>13</sup> that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death."

<sup>14</sup> "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."

<sup>15</sup> So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall."<sup>16</sup> Now she had said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

<sup>17</sup> The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us"<sup>18</sup> unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house."<sup>19</sup> If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him."<sup>20</sup> But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

<sup>21</sup> "Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

<sup>22</sup> When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them."<sup>23</sup> Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them."<sup>24</sup> They said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."

The issue I want to deal with today is who God chooses. I'm surprised that he chose me. And frankly, I'm shocked, that he chose you. One of God's most surprising choices is this woman, Rahab. We first encounter her at Jericho. Then we see her, of all places, in

Matthew's account of the ancestors of Jesus. Then we hear about her in James as an illustration of faith in action. Then we hear about her in Hebrews where she is listed in the catalog of great heroes of faith. She's right there with Abraham, Moses, David and Joseph.

The movie "Seabiscuit" portrays a character Tom Smith, who is a broken-down unemployed cowboy. Millionaire Charles Howard, who is about to engage in a horse racing enterprise, interviews Smith, and asks why he bothered rescuing an old, lame horse that was sentenced to death because of a broken leg. Tom replies, "You don't throw a whole life away just 'cause it's banged up a bit." "Every horse is good for something." Tom claims. His devotion to horses convinces the millionaire that Tom should be his trainer.

Together they find and purchase Seabiscuit, a horse whose physical shortcomings and temperament make it an unlikely prospect for racing success. Tom's method of training, while unorthodox, is tailored to cure the horse of his inner demons - a byproduct of the neglect shown by its previous owners. Tom hires a second-rate jockey named Red Pollard to ride Seabiscuit. At 5'7", Red is too tall to be anything but a bush-league jockey and a bad match for this undersized horse. But Tom spies a mystical connection between Red and Seabiscuit. Red has another handicap. He is blind in one eye, a handicap he concealed fearing track officials would no longer allow him to race. During a crucial race at Santa Anita, Red's limited vision allows a competing horse to overtake Seabiscuit on Red's blind side, costing them the victory. Tom, the trainer, is outraged that Red failed to urge Seabiscuit to keep the winning pace, pressing Red to explain how he'd let this happen. Finally, in a burst of emotion, Red shouts, "Because I'm blind!" Stung by the loss and betrayal, Tom scornfully urges Mr. Howard to fire Red. To Tom's surprise, Mr. Howard requests that Red remain as his jockey. Dumbfounded, Tom demands a reason. Mr. Howard states, "You don't throw away a whole life just because it's banged up a bit."

What was it about Rahab that so impressed God? In 1995 the mint in Philadelphia produced some pennies that were flawed. The words "liberty" and "in God" were fuzzy. Because there were just a few of those flawed pennies they are now worth \$200 each. God sees all of us a bit like that - flawed but valuable to him. If God didn't value flawed things, none of us could be saved. Hebrews and James both extol the faith of Rahab. What was it about her faith that was so significant?

### **1. When she learned about God she began acknowledging his handiwork.**

*"I know that the Lord has given you the land...the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea...The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below."* – Joshua 2:9-11 She readily acknowledges that the defeats of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og were because of God. If you have the faith of Rahab you don't invite people to church because we have a lot of good ministries, or because we have good music, or because the teaching is meaningful. Rahab-like faith invites people to church because we have a great God!

## **2. When she learned about God she took a stand against her culture.**

It was at the risk of her own life that Rahab hid the spies in her house. The ancient law code of Hammarabi, which Rahab may very well have lived under, states: "If felons are banded together in an ale-wife's house (prostitute's or innkeeper's house) and she has not haled them to the place, that ale-wife shall be put to death."

Let me tell you a true story about standing against the culture. According to Rick Atchley who called the young man in this story and confirmed its authenticity, this is what happened at the University of Texas in the 1970's. This young man, who prefers to remain anonymous, was a Junior pre-med student enrolled in organic chemistry. There were 1,000 students in the class on the first day. A primary purpose for this very difficult class was to weed out the pre-med majors who didn't need to be in the program. The professor was a belligerent atheist. He began class by saying, "Some of you have been deluded by the farce called Christianity. We are going to settle that right now." He picked up a 25-ounce glass beaker, held it high above his head, and asked, "How many of you believe you can pray to your God and I'll drop this beaker and it won't break?" The room was silent like it had been every year for many years. This young man was determined he would not be cowed by this challenge to his faith. So after a brief pause he stood up and said, "I'll pray." He prayed enthusiastically, "God, I know you are God whether that beaker breaks or not but in order to confront the arrogance of this professor, God, would you allow this beaker not to break?" He said, "Amen", the professor smirked and dropped the beaker. It landed right on his toe and rolled across the floor unbroken. One thousand students stood up and cheered.

Rahab-like faith takes a stand against the paganizing of our culture. Since 1972 there have been 47 sitcoms promoting homosexuality. Since 1956 there have been 26 soap operas promoting homosexuality. Since 1973 there have been 29 reality shows promoting homosexuality. Since 1981 there have been 85 dramatic shows promoting homosexuality. Since 1961 there have been 28 television specials promoting homosexuality. Since 1992 there have been 19 animated cartoon shows promoting homosexuality. Since Ellen came out of the closet in 1997 there have been 129 shows promoting homosexuality. My heart goes out to those who struggle with homosexuality but that does not mean I have to passively accept the campaign to normalize what the Bible says is sin. If there were efforts to normalize divorce, embezzlement, or drug usage it would be incumbent upon us to speak out against that as well. Rahab-like faith takes a stand against the paganizing of our culture.

## **3. The third thing about Rahab's faith that you need to see is she decided to save herself and her family from the certain destruction that was about to befall her culture.**

I confess to you I don't know how to save America but I do know how to save my family and a few others along the way. I don't know how Rahab did it but somehow she was able to persuade her family to go with her and join the Lord's side.

Let me ask you a question about this whole story about spies and a prostitute. Why does Israel even need someone to go spy on Jericho? Did they use the information to form a military battle plan? No. Did they need to know how prepared Jericho was in order to defeat them? No. If you remember the story they simply march around the city as directed by God and the walls fall down and the victory is theirs. So this is not a story about crucial information gained by 2 effective spies. It is a story about God's care and concern for one single person in a city that is about to be destroyed. God has a long track record about that sort of thing. Remember God delaying the destruction of Sodom on the hopes of finding 10 righteous people there?

We learn a lot about God in this text. This text teaches us that God can take a life that is really far-gone and change it. He can take the most despicable life and change it. He can take the most sinful person and change him or her. He can even change you. I know that some of you are not honest in your business dealings. Don't despair my dishonest friend, God can change you! I know that some of you are living in sexual sin. Don't despair my sexually sinful friend, God can change you. I know that some of you use God's name in vain. Don't despair my blasphemous friend, God can change you. I know that some of you are addicted to alcohol and drugs. Don't despair my drunken friend, God can change you. What God did with Rahab He can do with you. God took Rahab from the hall of shame to the hall of fame! He took a lady of the night and made her into an angel of light. He turned a prostitute into a princess.

This text teaches us that our sinful past lives can be used for the glory of God if we are upfront with people about what we used to be. Fifteen hundred years after the events of Joshua 2, Rahab was still being identified as "the prostitute". It's a tragic mistake when you are baptized to be so ashamed of your past that you begin living your Christian life as if you had always been Christian. Listen to the reputations of some church members at Corinth: *"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* - *I Corinthians 6:9-11* Years ago there was a church in West Virginia that was growing faster than any church in America. A friend of mine went to visit them to see what they were doing that resulted in such church growth. He attended a Sunday night service and said the preacher got up and began asking people in various groups to stand. First he asked all the prostitutes to stand and dozens of ladies of the night stood. Then he asked all the alcoholics to stand and an entire section of the auditorium stood. Then he asked all those with prison records to stand and again a group stood. On and on he went having one group of sinners after another to stand. I'm telling you people are dying to know that the church is a place where people are honest about their past lives – not proud of it but honest about it. Imagine being a male prostitute, going to church at Corinth and meeting a church member who says, "I'm glad you are here. I used to be a male prostitute and Jesus changed me. People in this church will love and accept you." Imagine being a homosexual, going to church at Corinth and meeting a church member who says, "I'm

glad you are here. I used to be a practicing homosexual and Jesus changed me. I want you to know that this is a place where you are accepted and loved right this moment.” Imagine being a thief, going to church at Corinth and meeting a church member who says, “I’m glad you are here. I served time in prison for being a thief and Jesus change me. This is a church where you can start over, where you can actually be born again.”

The story of Rahab the harlot is marvelous because it teaches us that people can change. Somewhere, some way, one day, God put his hands on each side of Rahab’s face and said, “Rahab you are such a sinner but wait until you see what I am going to do with you. All I ask is that you turn from idols and start believing in me. When you give up your idols and your sinful lifestyle, I’ll do such wonders in your life they’ll still be talking about it 3,000 years from now.”

Do you feel the hands of God on your face right now? Do you hear him saying, “I know you’re heading down the wrong path. I know you are self-destructing. I know there’s stuff going on in your life that if people knew it would be shocking. I know you’ve just about lost hope but know this, I love you and I will change you if you will let me.” Here’s the difference in how God sees you and how you see yourself. You see your past and God sees your potential.