



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Unexpected Mercy

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Joshua 2

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Believe it or not, this is one of the great Salvation stories of the Bible. It centers around two spies we don't know the names of and an unsavory woman named Rahab. Let me use the story itself for the introduction. You can read it yourself and I'll give commentary as we go.

2 And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. ² And it was told to the king of Jericho, "Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." ³ Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." ⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. ⁵ And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." ⁶ But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. ⁷ So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

⁸ Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof ⁹ and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. ¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. ¹² Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." ¹⁴ And the men said to her, "Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. ¹⁶ And she said to them, "Go into the hills, or the pursuers will

encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.”¹⁷ The men said to her, “We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear.”¹⁸ Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household.¹⁹ Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head.²⁰ But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.”²¹ And she said, “According to your words, so be it.” Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

²² They departed and went into the hills and remained there three days until the pursuers returned, and the pursuers searched all along the way and found nothing.²³ Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they told him all that had happened to them.²⁴ And they said to Joshua, “Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.”

(Pastor prays)

So in verse 1 we see that Joshua sent the spies and they came to Rahab's house like so many men before. But this time was different. Something had changed. Verse 2 tells us that they are not very good spies because the King already knows they are there and that they've come to search out the land. He demands that Rahab hand them over. Here's where it gets a little problematic because Rahab's goose is cooked. So in verse 4, Rahab hid the two spies and in verses 5-7 she tells a bald face lie to trick the Kings men and sends them on a wild goose chase. Then verse 8 takes us to the testimony of Rahab that is the central theme of this chapter. It's where we find out...

God Works in Ways We never Dreamed of Through People We Never Imagined

That means several things for us.

We never lose hope

In verse 1 we are introduced to Rahab. She is an unlikely heroine and the product of uncommon grace. What do we know about Rahab? She had a house built in the city wall of Jericho. She might have been an innkeeper who augmented her income doing favors. She was a pagan with no upbringing to know God. If she worshipped, she worshipped Baal, Asherah, Marduk and Ishtar. She has a terrible and accurate reputation. Even the King knows of her. I've softened this

up because there are children in the room. But of all the people living in Jericho that God might save, she was far and away the worst!

And yet, look what grace does. We don't know how she heard or when she came to believe, but verses 9-11 contain one of the clearest statements of faith in the entire Old Testament: that God, by sheer grace, would reach over and save a lying pagan sinner woman of ill repute reminds us that we can never give up hope for people we think are too far gone, too lost, or hate the church too much.

Think with me about Rahab and the rest of her story. She follows through with what the spies tell her to do. Israel attacks Jericho and destroys it and everyone in it except for Rahab and her family. In Joshua 6 we find out that she becomes a part of Israel. And in Matthew 1 we find out she is King David's great-grandmother and in the line of Jesus. In James 2, she is called "righteous" and then in Hebrews 11, as the author is chiseling out the Mount Rushmore of God's people, he carves in Rahab's name.

She is a woman who lived by faith. When no one else can, God can. Here is a picture of the free and sovereign grace of God saving a rank pagan. And if you've got to put yourself in this story, you are not Joshua. You are not even the two spies. You are Rahab. What did Spurgeon say? "When the devil tells you that you are a sinner, just say 'thank God' because Christ died for sinners." And it's because of His grace we never lose hope.

We never give up

Since we are studying Rahab, let's think clearly about her. In verses 2-3, the King knows that two men came to spy out Israel and were at Rahab's house. Let's read verses 3-7. ³ *Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."* ⁴ *But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from."* ⁵ *And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."* ⁶ *But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.* ⁷ *So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.*

Now Rahab is already a believer before these spies get there, and her solution was to lie. That's what she knows. She doesn't have any shame. We are justified instantly, but we are sanctified over a lifetime. We cannot stay the same and we can never give up striving, trying, praying, reading, and repenting. Even Jeremiah knew that in Lamentations when he said in Lamentations 3:22-23, *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

That is sanctification. We never give up because God never gives up, and He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. We never lose hope. We never give up.

We never stop praying

Go with me to verses 8-10 and just read what she says especially in verses 9-10. ⁸ *Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof⁹ and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.*

Rahab knows that God is the giver. God is powerful and God is the deliverer. She recognizes His sovereignty and she recognizes His power to deliver. She recognizes His power to defeat enemies. And based on God's sovereign power, you are to go to Him and ask. Rahab is going to ask that her family—out of all the hundreds of people in Jericho—she is asking that God will save them, and He did it.

What are you asking for? When you think of God's all-powerful presence, what are you asking Him to do that will bring honor to His name? That will adorn the Gospel or lead someone to trust in Christ? Who are you asking God to deliver?

As you look at your life and realize you are a picture of His good grace, who are you praying that God will open their eyes to see God's grace? We look at the miracle that God did in Rahab and hear her faith in what God can do, and we are reminded that God works in ways we never dreamed of through people we never imagined.

We never lose hope. We never give up. We never stop praying.

We never despair

You ought to just block out verse 11 and make it your theme. I mean have you ever heard a clearer statement of faith from a new convert? Rahab's statement here is remarkable and deserves some reflection. Let's read verse 11b. *For the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.* Here is a pagan, lady of the night, affirming the dominion of YHWH over all the other Canaanite gods. Not only that, here Rahab makes a fundamental declaration about God.

He is primary. He is above all and must be first in our thoughts. He must have dominion over our life, love and lifestyle. He is sovereign. He is over all and must be trusted. We must see His exclusivity. He is not one of *many* gods but the *only*, and there is no other.

This is no "Coexist" bumper sticker. This is the claim of Jesus and the hallmark of true Christianity. This is the strength of the Gospel, the Gospel that says that God is good and holy and created everything including mankind, all of us in this room. You were created in the image of God. That image of God within you and me has been disfigured by our own sin to the degree that we are separated from God. Jesus Christ, who was fully man and is fully God, lived perfectly, earning righteousness that you and I can't do. Then Jesus took the wrath of God in the place of sinners. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus died on the cross for us. Then God raised Him from the dead, He ascended into heaven; and He sits at the right hand of God and rules the entire universe.

We can never work our way to Heaven, but the work of righteousness has been done in Christ. The work of salvation has been done in Christ, so what is left for you is to believe. To believe means turning from sin, knowing that it is wrong, and turning to Christ, believing that Jesus saves.

We know that God is singularity. He is God in Heaven above and earth beneath. Take a look at that phrase, "God in Heaven above and earth beneath." That phrase is found only three other times in the Old Testament, and each time it's out of the mouth of Moses and connected to the giving of the law. It is in Exodus 20:4 after the first tablets were destroyed. It's in Deuteronomy 4 with a warning. It is in Deuteronomy 5. Deuteronomy means "the second giving of the law."

And here Rahab has even internalized the singular truth about God. We also know that God has prerogative. This gives us the most trouble, that the Lord your God is God in Heaven above and earth beneath, and as such He has prerogative, and one of the great signs of Christian maturity is learning to rejoice in God's prerogative even as His ways would not be the ways you would choose. But because he is God in Heaven above and earth beneath, we never despair. And I would like to add to that.

We never forget mercy.

That's in verses 12-13. You see Rahab here declaring God's faithfulness and asking for mercy for her and her family. They have no idea that it's her plea for mercy that saves them. We are products of mercy and, as such, we are producers of mercy. God has had mercy on you today. His mercies are new every morning and part of that Gospel mercy is to release hatred and bitterness, revenge and resentment. Or my default, being done with someone. They are dead to me. The mercy of God found at the cross of Jesus doesn't allow for that. His mercy saves us and compels us and reminds us of one last "never."

We never take our eyes off Jesus

Tucked into this story is one little Gospel signal. It's down there in verse 18. Listen to what the spies tell Rahab to do that would signify deliverance. ¹⁸ *Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household.*

That scarlet cord would be the signal and sign of safety. Just as in Exodus 11 the blood of the lamb was put on the doorpost and the Angel of Death passed over and the people were saved. Draw a straight line to the cross of Jesus where His blood was shed to deliver His people, to free us from sin, to cleanse us in His righteousness.

And this story reminds us that God works in ways we never dreamed of through people we never imagined. If He could save Rahab, He can save you. If He will use Rahab, He will use you.

Never take our eyes off Jesus.

(Pastor prays)