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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes

## INTRODUCTION

I am doing a series on Sunday nights called "Big Events of the Old Testament." The last message was about the snakes in the wilderness during the forty years of wandering and waiting for everyone over the age of 20 to die. Now they come to the threshold of the Promised Land and they are ready to enter in. The first big event that happens as they begin to enter the Promised Land is a significant character who is not only a woman, but who is also a prostitute!

I heard a story the other day about a man who was walking down the beach. He was walking along and he stumbled upon a strange looking lamp. He picked it up and dusted the sand off of it. As he was dusting the sand off of it a genie appeared and said, "Oh, thank you for releasing me. I have been trapped for 10,000 years and now I will grant you one wish." The guy was pretty excited about it and he said, "Well I've always wanted to go to Hawaii but I am deathly afraid to fly and I'll never get on a boat so I wonder could you build me a bridge from California to Hawaii so I can drive to Hawaii?" The genie said, "You have to be kidding! You know that's a lot of steel and a lot of concrete I don't know that I can do that! Can you come up with another wish?" The guy scratched his head and thought for a moment and he said, "You know I've never understood women can you tell me how a woman ticks how she thinks?" The genie thought for a moment and he said, "You want that to be 2-lane bridge or a 4-lane bridge?" I think sometimes women have been accused of being hard to understand and a little bit mysterious but I don't think they were ever intended to be understood as much as they were intended to be appreciated. It's very easy to appreciate this wonderful Old Testament character named Rahab. She's known as "Rahab, the harlot."

Joshua 2:1. "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."

Now your footnote may say that word in Hebrew could mean "innkeeper" but in that vernacular it's much the same thing and the word in the New Testament to describe her is the common word for harlot or prostitute.

Joshua 2:2-21. "The king of Jericho was told, 'Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.' 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.' 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. 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.' (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) 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.

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof 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. 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. 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. 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 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.' '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.'

So, she let them down by a rope through the window for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. 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.' The men said to her, 'This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord [or this scarlet thread] in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and your mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. 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 in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you make us swear. '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.'

We're not going to talk about the fall of Jericho tonight, because that's the next message in this series. The title of that message is, "Joshua DIDN'T fit the battle of Jericho." It wasn't Joshua. It was God and God alone who destroyed the walls of Jericho. We *do* know Jericho was one of the most heavily fortified cities in the ancient world and even today you can go to the archeological ruins of Jericho and archeologists will tell you as they dig down to the lowest strata of rock that there was a cataclysmic destruction of the city in which the walls seemed to collapse. We even have archeological evidence there were houses built into the thick city walls, just like it says here.

In this first story about the beginning of the conquering of the Promised Land shows us that God can strike a mighty lick with a crooked stick. In other words, God can use all kinds of people—anyone who's available to him. You've heard this story before and if you haven't, you just heard it. What I want to do now is go below the level of the actual historical story itself and talk about how what Rahab did is a beautiful picture of what all of us must do if we want to be redeemed, if we want to be part of the family of God, because this is basically what Rahab did. She was a part of the people who lived in the area around Jericho, but she made a decision. She said, "I no longer want to be affiliated with my past with these people of my past I choose to be a part of the family of God." If you want to be a part of the family of God you have to follow these five steps.

## **1. Renounce your past**

Number one. To be a part of God's family we must renounce our past. That means we must

admit we are a sinner. For most people that's not very difficult to do at all. What does it mean when we say Rahab was a prostitute? She was a harlot. You've all heard it before that the oldest profession in the world is prostitution. Although we recognize it as illegal in America and as a terrible sexual sin, when you study history, you will find prostitution has been a part of every culture throughout history. In fact, in the ancient religions prostitution was a part of their pagan worship, because they worshiped anything they didn't understand. Because they didn't understand the process of human reproduction, they worshiped the process itself. Prostitutes actually were like temple icons or were called temple prostitutes. Here was Rahab who lived a lifestyle all of us would consider sinful, but it is very obvious in this story that she comes to a place in her life when she decides she no longer wants to be a part of that kind of lifestyle. "I no longer want to be identified as a prostitute. Instead, I want to identify with God and his people." Before you can ever become a Christian, that's exactly what you and I must do. We must say, "I am a sinner but no longer do I want to be identified with my sinful past. Instead, I choose to be identified with God."

## 2. Recognize God's power

Here's the second thing she did that we must also do: You must recognize God's power. In other words, once you admit you are a sinner, then you have to believe God has enough power to save you. Verse 9 to me is absolutely amazing, because she makes a profession of faith. She says, "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and a great fear has come upon us." She said, "All of these forty years our hearts have been melting with fear!" Rewind the biblical narrative about 40 years earlier to Kadesh Barnea. Remember when Moses sent the 12 spies into the land and 10 of them came back saying, "It's a wonderful land flowing with milk and honey!" but they said "There are giants in the land" and this is exactly what they said they said, "Our hearts melted with fear!" Two of the spies came back and said, "Hey, listen. We're afraid. Those people are bigger than us. Those people are stronger than us and we can't take it!" So do you know what God said? He said, "Okay, take another lap around Mt. Sinai and take another lap; just wander in the wilderness until you die off." Forty years later when these two spies come into the land, can you imagine their jaws dropped when suddenly they hear this story? "The people in the land said, "Our hearts have been melting with fear because we heard how strong and powerful your God is." I have news for you! Sometimes we seem to be overwhelmed by all the evil and all the wickedness in the world, don't we! Sometimes we think, "Here we are the little weak minority God's chosen few." Somebody said, "God's frozen few sometimes." "Here we are this little Christian minority in an evil world." I have news for you. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. We should not look at the world and be afraid because in the end we win! I've read the last chapter; we're the ones who win this thing. So, we should walk out in courage and faith, because the world is the one who trembles before God not vice versa.

In Hebrews 11, in the Roll call of Faith, it says, "By faith, the prostitute, Rahab," that's why I said that's the Greek word for prostitute "because she welcomed the spies was not killed with those who were disobedient." In other words what the New Testament says is that Rahab was exercising faith in God when she protected and hid those spies. So, first thing renounce your past. "I'm a sinner!" Number two, recognize God's power. "God, you have power to change my life!"

### 3. Request God's mercy

Number three you must request God's mercy. You may be here today and you may say, number one, "I'm a sinner, no problem with that," Number two. "I believe God has power to save me!" but did you know you don't become a Christian until you ask God to save you, until you request God? That's exactly what she did. Verse 12 says, "Please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you." In other words she realized she was doomed. She had enough faith in God to believe everybody in that city was going to die and she said, "Listen! I don't want to die! I want to be saved! So I'm asking you the spies the representatives of God 'Will you save me?'" Did you know a person without Jesus Christ is eternally doomed? You must realize you must come to God and say, "God, I am calling upon you for grace. I am calling upon you for mercy! I am trusting you!"

Not long ago I was reading an article by a Christian businessman. He said he was talking to another businessman who didn't claim to be a Christian. This non-Christian businessman said to the Christian, "Listen. I have this religious thing all figured out! In everybody's life there is a set of stairs. The Baptists have one set of stairs. The Catholics have another set of stairs. The Muslims have another set of stairs. Even people who kind of have their own personal faith and religion have their own set of stairs. In the end all the stairs lead up to God. When you get to the top of your stairs, you're going to see Jesus, when the Muslims get to the top of their stairs, they're going to see Mohammed when the Buddhists get to the top of their stairs, they're going to see Buddha. The Christian businessman said, "You know. That is an interesting idea. Unfortunately, it is wrong. If you believe that, you will experience eternal separation from God in a place called hell!" This guy was straightforward with him and said, "The mistake you have made is this: Jesus is the stair and Jesus is the only stairway. He's not what you find at the end of the stairway. He is himself the stairway to God. He said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.'"

Rahab recognized the fact that her city was about to fall. She was about to die and she recognized there was one source of salvation—God and God alone! She said, "I'm asking you to save me!" That's the third thing she did.

### 4. Reveal your allegiance

Number four. If you're going to be a part of God's family, you must reveal your allegiance. In other words, you must make a choice to demonstrate you are committed to your God. How did she do this? How did she reveal her allegiance? She did it in two ways, number one when she was confronted by her own people about where these representatives from God were, she protected them! But the way she really revealed her allegiance to God is this. Those two spies said, "Here is the sign that we want you to show. Your house is in the wall and you have a window that is built on the outside of the wall," because that's how the spies escaped. She let them down with a rope. They said, "We want you to take a scarlet cord, a piece of cloth woven together, and we want you to hang it out the window. If you do that, when your city falls, everybody in your house including you will be saved. But if you don't hang that scarlet cord out the window, you will die and everybody in that house will die. I want you to think about this for a moment. That scarlet cord was such a small, insignificant detail. What if Rahab had said something like this? "Well, it's not a cord that saves you. It's God that's going to save me. I

don't have to do that cord." She says, "All I have to do is just pray!" If she did that, do you know what would have happened? She would have died and everybody in her house would have died.

Charles Spurgeon has a wonderful message about the scarlet thread. He says, "In the lives of Christians today the scarlet thread represents those small details of commitment that sometimes we think are not important." Baptism, "I don't have to be baptized that's just a symbol! Well, if God tells you to be baptized, it's like hanging that scarlet thread out there. You had better do it! The Lord's Supper is a detail you need to follow. Church membership, devotional life; those little details. Those are the scarlet threads in our lives. By the way some of you who know Dr. W.A. Criswell did you know that one night he preached a 4-hour sermon! Are you ready for that? And the title of the message was, "The Scarlet Thread That Runs Throughout the Bible," because the scarlet thread is also a picture of the blood of Jesus Christ. There are several references in the Bible to the scarlet thread. This is just one of them. You must put your faith in the blood of Jesus Christ to save you. So the way you do that is the way you reveal your allegiance. Are you following it so far? The steps she took are exactly the steps we must take. Renounce your past: "I am a sinner!" Recognize that God has power to save you. Then, simply request his mercy. Then, reveal your commitment: Baptism, church membership, receiving the Lord's Supper.

## 5. Rescue your loved ones

Now here's the final thing and it's very important to me. We must rescue our loved ones. Don't miss that part of the story. Rahab could have said, "That's neat. I don't want to die. I'm going to put that scarlet thread out my window and when the judgement comes when the city falls I'm going to be safe and sound." But she didn't say that. She said, "I've got a father. I've got a mother. I have brothers and sisters and I have friends and I want them to be saved. So, I want them to come into my house and be safe." If you've had the blood of Jesus Christ applied to your heart and you've already taken these first four steps. You're a Christian. You all know people who, if they died now would face the judgement of God. We ought to have the same kind of concern and compassion Rahab had. We ought to be so concerned about our loved ones that we want to bring them in to the shelter of salvation.

That's just one reason we are having a "Friend Day." It's not some gimmick to just try to increase our attendance. We really believe you have friends, students you have people you work with and neighbors and relatives that if they died, they wouldn't go to heaven. So, we want to bring them into the protection of the love and salvation of God just like Rahab did. She said, "Come on into my house." What we're going to see next time is that the walls crumbled all except that one house remained standing because God said, "When I see the scarlet thread, I will allow my judgement to pass over you."

There's an epilogue to the story of Rahab. I told you this morning that God is the only one who can change a prostitute into a princess. What happened to Rahab after the city of Jericho fell? I believe she became an integral part of the children of Israel. When you look at the book of Matthew and read the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ, there's an interesting name that pops up: Rahab. Rahab is in the line of descendants for the Lord Jesus. Matthew 1 lists Jesus' genealogy and in Matthew 1:5 says, "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab..." In other

words, God can take a prostitute and turn her into a princess and she can even become a part of the line of the Savior of the whole world. If you study that genealogy a little bit, you will find Rahab becomes the great-great-grandmother of the greatest king of Israel, David himself. You can't do anything about your ancestors, but everybody in this room can do something about your descendants. You can bring them in to the protection of God's grace and love.

## CONCLUSION

Many of you have heard the story before of Iris Blue, the prostitute from Houston, Texas whose body was basically worn out when she was in her early thirties and if you have heard her testimony, she said, "It wasn't the years, it was the mileage." So, she became a pimp for other prostitutes in downtown Houston. One night some members from Second Baptist Church were in the seedy part of Houston witnessing to the street people. One night somebody told Iris Blue that she could have a brand new life that her past could be forgiven and she could start over in life. That was a message that broke through the resistance of her heart. If you have ever heard Iris Blue's testimony, it is powerful. She says, "I knelt down a tramp, and I stood up a lady! You talk about turning a sow's ear into a silk purse! God can turn a prostitute into a princess! God can even take losers like each one of us and turn us into more than converts for Jesus Christ.

## OUTLINE

If you want to be a part of the family of God:

1. Renounce your past
2. Recognize God's power
3. Request God's mercy
4. Reveal your allegiance
5. Rescue your loved ones