

INTRODUCTION

I heard a funny story about a seminary student who tried to have a scriptural basis for everything he did. He wanted to have a book, chapter, and verse to back up all of his actions. He was doing okay until he fell in love with a beautiful girl. He was smitten, and he really wanted to kiss her, but he couldn't find a verse to allow him. So, true to his convictions, he would escort her to her front porch every night, look at her longingly, and then shake her hand and say, "goodnight." He suspected she really wanted to kiss him, too, but she was waiting for him to make the first move.

This went on for several frustrating weeks. He searched the scriptures and found a verse in Romans 16 that said, "Greet each other with a holy kiss." He was excited until he asked one of his Bible professors about it who told him that the verse dealt with a church setting, not a romantic setting. So, he was disappointed and frustrated that he couldn't find a Bible verse to justify kissing his girlfriend. Later that same evening, he walked her to her front porch, and started to shake her hand. In a flash his girlfriend grabbed his shoulders, pulled him toward her and laid a sloppy 10-second kiss on his lips. At the end of the kiss, the breathless seminary student said, "Bible verse, Bible verse!" She grabbed him a second time and just before kissing him again said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!"

We should all be as committed to following God's Word! Last week we started the series from Joshua entitled, "Making the Leap from Good to GREAT!" There is a level of Christian living that is like wandering in the wilderness—that's good. You'll go to heaven, but you'll be pretty miserable until you do. But there is also a level of Christian living called the Spirit-filled life. It is symbolized by Joshua and God's people moving into Canaan. It's what Jesus meant when He said, "I've come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10) That's Canaan. It's an exciting life full of battles—but also full of victory in Jesus.

On the way into Canaan, we are introduced to an interesting character. Her name is Rahab.

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."

These spies were recognized as outsiders and the King of Jericho came looking for them. Rahab risked her life and hid them under some stalks of flax on her roof.

Joshua 2:8-15. "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.

Before they left, we see Rahab accepted their proposal.

Joshua 2:21, 24. "'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...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.'"

God encouraged Joshua three times in Chapter 1. He said, "Be strong and courageous." The report of the two spies only added to Joshua's courage! On our way into Canaan, let's push the pause button and study the life of this woman named Rahab.

As I studied this scripture about Rahab, I couldn't shake the single overriding truth that reached out and grabbed me by the lapels. It's a timeless truth: God can transform anyone who puts their trust in Him. Rahab is the perfect example of someone who experienced a life-changing encounter with God. She was a prostitute, yet when the Bible lists famous people of faith in Hebrews 11, guess who is included? Hebrews 11:31 says "By faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

God took her from the House of Shame to the Hall of Fame. God can change a lady of the night into a lady of the light. He can change a woman of ill repute into a woman of illustrious reputation. God can turn a harlot into a heroine. And in this message we're going to examine just *how* He changes a prostitute into a princess. Rahab is a great model to us of the power of faith. In this message I want to identify five characteristics of saving faith Rahab possessed. If you want to be transformed by God, you must have this kind of faith as well.

1. SAVING FAITH IS INITIATED BY GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

The book of Joshua is all about the children of Israel moving in and conquering the Holy Land. The story of Rahab almost breaks the flow of the action—why is it included? It's because God knew there was a woman in Jericho who was seeking Him, so before the city was destroyed, this woman had to be saved.

Every salvation story begins with God's grace. We may think we *choose* to seek God. But the Bible makes it clear that before we choose Him, He has already chosen us. It's not because we *deserve* to be chosen, but because of His grace. I can't even exercise faith on my own; it is a gift from God. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Let's be honest. Those of us who are "respectable folks" are a little uncomfortable about God

choosing a prostitute like Rahab. Surely there were finer people in Jericho! But God's grace is amazing because of the people He chooses.

If God was going to destroy Tyler and decided to spare the life of just one person, who would it be? Surely the pastor of some big church! Or perhaps the mayor, or the richest person? How would we react if He chose to save some crack-addicted streetwalker, a homeless bum, or a convicted criminal? When we sing the first line of Amazing Grace, most of us really don't mean it. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." We sing it, but most of us are thinking, "Oh I don't consider myself a wretch—I'm a pretty good person." We are really thinking, "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like HIM, or HER, or them." John Newton could write "Amazing Grace," because he had been an English slave trader who had bought and sold human life. When he realized God could turn a slave trader into a song writer, there was only one word to describe that kind of grace—amazing!

I read about a little girl who had collection of dolls. It included dozens of dolls of all descriptions. It was obvious her doll collection brought her great pleasure. Once a visitor to her home asked her, "of all these dolls which is your favorite?" She said, "Just a minute and I'll show you." She went into her closet and brought out a doll that would have been rejected by Goodwill. It was missing one eye, and had lost most of its hair. The head was hanging onto the neck by a sliver of plastic. The dress was old and dirty and one shoe was missing. The visitor was surprised and asked, "Why do you love this doll so much?" The little girl said, "Because if I didn't, nobody would." Here was Rahab—dirty and stained by her own sinfulness—but loved by God. That's why His grace is so amazing! He looks at broken, sin-stained people like us and loves us anyway!

2. SAVING FAITH IS GENERATED BY HEARING ABOUT GOD

Rahab had heard about the greatness of God. No doubt many of her customers were men who had traveled throughout the region. She had heard about a God who had dried up the water of the Red Sea. The first step of faith is simply *hearing* about God, then if you *believe* what you hear, faith is born. Rahab said, "I know that the Lord has given this land to you." Imagine that! She had more faith than ten of the spies who had inspected the land 40 years earlier. She reported that all the people were terrified of the army of Israel. While the children of Israel wandered for 40 years out of fear of the inhabitants of Canaan, the people of Canaan were actually more afraid of *them*! Rahab didn't fear the army of Israel, she feared the God of Israel. The Bible says "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 1:7)

Rahab heard these reports about God and she believed. Our faith is generated the same way. The Bible says in Romans 10:17 "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ."

Rahab hadn't been at the Red Sea to witness the miracle. If she had, it wouldn't have been faith—it would have been sight. She heard and believed. The Jews had witnessed the miracle of the Red Sea—they had seen and heard the evidence of God's thunderous presence on Mt. Sinai. And they still disobeyed Him.

People are looking for visible evidences of God today. I call them miracle mongers. In 2004 a lady in Florida sold a grilled cheese sandwich for \$28,000 because people thought they saw an image of Mary on the sandwich. These miracle mongers believe if they can see some sign their faith will be strengthened—when just the opposite occurs.

If right now, God levitated me above this congregation and spun me around a few times, word would spread around the area, and next Sunday we'd be packed out. But if I didn't levitate next week, the crowd would be smaller the following week. If your faith is dependent on visible signs, when the signs aren't there, your faith suffers.

Faith is generated by the Word of God. Rahab heard about God and believed. She believed before she saw the walls of Jericho fall around her. As you read these words telling you that Jesus Christ can come into your life and change you forever. Do you believe? Rahab did.

3. SAVING FAITH IS DEMONSTRATED BY GOOD DEEDS

Rahab added good works to her faith. The New Testament book of James was written by the half-brother of Jesus (they had the same mother, but different dads!). When James argues about the importance of adding good works to your faith, he uses Rahab as an illustration. He writes, James 2:25-26 "Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

Because Rahab believed, she demonstrated her faith in at least three tangible ways. First, she put her own life at risk in hiding the spies on her roof. If they had been discovered, she would have been executed on the spot. In addition, she lowered the spies from her house and gave them directions to avoid the soldiers of Jericho. And finally, she demonstrated her faith by displaying a scarlet rope outside her window. In the first century, Clement of Rome was the first preacher to suggest the scarlet thread was a symbol of saving blood of Jesus. During the Passover in Egypt, God promised when He saw the blood of the innocent lamb on the door, judgement and death would "pass over" that family. In a few days, the attacking army was going to swarm Jericho, carrying out God's judgement against them. When the attacking army saw the red rope, they didn't disturb that house. It was a "safe zone."

Herbert Lockyer wrote about this red rope: "Rahab's sins had been scarlet, but the scarlet line displayed as a token of her safety, typified the red blood of Jesus whereby the worst of sinners can be saved from sin and hell." (*All the Women of the Bible*, p. 131)

Real faith is always accompanied by good works. According the Ephesians 2, (see above) there are three steps to salvation. First, God's grace is extended to a sinner—it is BY grace. Then, a sinner responds to God THROUGH faith—and even that is a gift from God. Then the last step is that we are saved UNTO good works.

Sadly, many religious people have the order reversed. They think they will be saved BY good works. They work to attend Mass, or take the sacraments, or to get baptized, or to donate money to God's work thinking that these acts will insure their place in heaven. Good works don't

produce salvation; they are the *product* of salvation.

On the other side of the spectrum are those mistaken believers who think once they get their ticket punched to heaven, there's really nothing to do. They walked an aisle, got dunked, and got their name on a membership role. But they think they don't have to attend church, or serve God, or give to God's work. After all, "once saved always saved! I can do whatever I want and I'm going to heaven." They just sit around and wait for heaven.

There's a poem that says, "He wasn't much for stirring about; That wasn't his desire; While others worked to serve the Lord; He was just sittin' by the fire. Same old story, day by day, he never seemed to tire. While others faithfully served the Lord, he was just sittin' by the fire. One day he died as all must do. Some say he went up higher. But if he's doing what he always did, he's STILL sittin' by the fire!"

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father." (Matthew 7:21) James said faith without works is like a dead body. It may be embalmed and dressed up nicely, but it's still dead.

As a college student I learned a poem I've never forgotten. It says, "I cannot work my soul to save; That work my Lord has done; But I will work like any slave; For the love of God's dear Son." Are you demonstrating your faith with good deeds?

4. SAVING FAITH IS COMMUNICATED TO THOSE WE LOVE

There is an important nuance to this story I don't want you to miss. When Rahab asked for and received kindness in being protected, she also included her family in that request. It wasn't enough for her to be saved; she was concerned for others as well. Salvation is such a valuable gift, that once you have received it, you will always want to share it with others. One of my favorite disciples was Andrew. When Andrew met the Lord, he wasn't content until he brought his older brother Peter to meet Him as well.

The Apostle Paul was once a Jewish Pharisee, but after he met Jesus, his obsession was for his Jewish friends to come to know Jesus as well. In Romans 10:1 he said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they might be saved."

God honored the faith of Rahab in protecting her family. She told them about God's power. During the attack on Jericho she brought them into the only safe place in the city. The only house identified by a scarlet thread. It's amazing how God honors our faith on behalf of others.

I love the story recorded in Mark 2. Jesus is sitting in a house teaching, while outside there are four men carrying their paralyzed friend to Jesus. There is such a crowd, they can't get inside the house. So, they go up on the roof and dig a hole large enough to lower their friend on a stretcher right in front of Jesus. The Bible says in Mark 2:5: "When Jesus saw THEIR faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"

Do you have faith? Are you going to heaven? If you are, you shouldn't be content until you are

certain that all your loved ones come to know Jesus as well. Your job, like Rahab, is to bring them to a place of God's protection and safety. Most of you can't preach, or you don't know the four laws, or the seven steps, or the 40 days. But what you CAN do is to simply bring them to the Body of Christ, the church, where they can be exposed to the power of God.

5. SAVING FAITH IS VALIDATED BY A CHANGE IN CHOICES

Rahab was tired of living the life of a prostitute. She knew how she was living was wrong. She also knew *where* she was living was wrong. She lived in a society that approved of her lifestyle. That led her to make some life-changing choices. The same thing happens to us when we find ourselves in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 God says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Rahab chose a new faith. Once she heard about the one true God of heaven and earth, she turned from the pagan polytheism that was part of her Canaanite culture. Following Jesus today isn't popular in our culture, but those who chose Him will be blessed.

In addition to a new faith, she chose a new family. Instead of identifying with the city of Jericho, she chose instead to be identified with the people of God. Have you done that? Once you put your faith in God, you will want to join a local church so you can identify with the family of God.

Her choices of a new faith and a new family also led her to choose a new future. What do you think would have been her future if she hadn't chosen to identify with God's people? She would have grown into an old prostitute who would have found herself no longer attractive to men. But her faith led her to an eternal future beyond her wildest dreams.

Is it possible for a person to change direction in life? Anna Nalick is one the brightest singer/songwriters to come along in awhile. She has written some amazing lyrics. In her song, "Breathe (2AM)" she observed, "We can't jump the track, we're like cars on a cable; And life's like an hourglass glued to the table." That's a powerful picture. Is life really like an hourglass glued to the table? We may not be able to lift the hourglass off the table and flip it over, but God is the God of the second chance. If the hourglass is glued to the table, He can turn your table upside down—He is the God of the second chance. Or, even better, God can rip the top off the hourglass and pour in a never-ending stream of sand: That's what eternal life is all about!

CONCLUSION

A few years ago, we had a guest speaker named Iris Blue. Iris had been a prostitute from the time she was a teenager. She had gotten into drugs, and had spent much of her life in prison. One evening, she was on the streets of Houston attempting to sell her body to men who passed by. Some men from a Baptist Church were there sharing the gospel of Jesus. They explained to Iris that with Jesus, she could be born again. The message struck a chord in her heart, and she opened her heart to Jesus. She described her conversion on the street corner in Houston this way: "I knelt down a tramp, and stood up a lady!"

You're probably not a prostitute like Rahab or Iris, but we all have things in our past we regret. We all have skeletons in the closet. God is making you the same offer He made to Rahab. He's saying, "Whatever you have done, it doesn't matter. I can forgive you, I can change you. Come home to me."

I love that old song by Gloria Gaither, "Something beautiful, something good; All my confusion He understood; All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife; But He made something beautiful of my life."

Now for the best part: Do you know when Rahab chose a new future with God that he honored her in an amazing way? He really did turn a prostitute into a princess. In the first chapter of Matthew, we find the genealogy of the parents of Jesus. Rahab is listed as one of the descendants of the Messiah! Matthew 1:5 says, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ:...Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David." Rahab ended up marrying Salmon (his brothers started an investment firm). It's not in the Bible, but Jewish tradition says Salmon was one of the two spies Rahab hid. Salmon and Rahab had a son named Boaz who later married another famous woman in the Bible—Ruth. Rahab ended up being the great-great grandmother of King David—the greatest king of Israel. And she was a matriarch in the line of the sinless Savior whose blood is the scarlet thread of protection from God's judgement on a sinful person. In God's book, that qualifies Rahab as a princess! And that, my friend, is how God changes a prostitute into a princess. If He can do that, imagine what He can do for you!

OUTLINE

TIMELESS TRUTH: GOD CAN TRANSFORM ANYONE WHO PUTS THEIR TRUST IN HIM.

"By faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." *Hebrews 11:31*

SAVING FAITH IS:

1. INITIATED BY GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are GOD'S workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." *Ephesians 2:8-10*

2. GENERATED BY HEARING ABOUT GOD

"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ." *Romans 10:17*

3. DEMONSTRATED BY GOOD DEEDS

"Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." *James 2:25-26*

4. COMMUNICATED TO THOSE WE LOVE

"My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." *Romans 10:1*

5. VALIDATED BY A CHANGE IN CHOICES

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" *2 Corinthians 5:17*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes