

Shackled by the Past?

My Pastor reminded me this past Sunday of a very interesting story in Scripture that seems to be so relative today; the story of Rahab. Most all of us can relate to the person of Rahab in some way.

You see, Rahab was well known as a prostitute! With just one exception, every time Rahab is mentioned in Scripture, referring to an individual, we are reminded that she was a “prostitute”. It seems that she would never escape her sinful past or her reputation.

We first learn of Rahab in the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. This story takes place after the children of Israel had wandered in the desert for forty years as a result of their failure to trust and obey God. The setting is after Moses had died, and after Joshua had taken his place in leading the Israelites to take the land God had promised Abraham.

In chap 2, Joshua sent the two spies across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land to scout it out. When they secretly entered the city of Jericho, they stayed in the home of ‘Rahab the prostitute’ to escape being found out by the King of Jericho. Rahab hid them on her roof and lied to protect the spies when the arresting officials came for them.

Later in this chapter we see Rahab made a deal with the spies that when Israel came and conquered Jericho, the lives of her and her family would be spared because of what she had done for them. This covenant was sealed by the understanding that Rahab would tie a scarlet cord from her window and gather all of her family into her house. When the assault began, her house would be identified by the scarlet cord and no one who was in the house would be harmed.

In Joshua chapter 6, we see that Joshua honored the covenant made between Rahab and the spies and when the walls of Jericho fell and every living creature was killed by the sword, only Rahab and her family survived. (Just an interesting side observation, the walls of Jericho fell when the people marched around the city and sounded the trumpets. One of the outer walls of Rahab’s house was part of the wall of the city (Jos 2:15), yet when the city walls collapsed, God spared Rahab’s house and the lives of all those in it! Jos 6:22-23). Only the two spies knew which house was hers. Only the scarlet cord would protect her from the onslaught that came on that city.

Jos. 6:25 tells us that Rahab and her family lived with the Israelites from that day forward. She lived with them as one of them. How could this be? How could a well known prostitute outsider like Rahab with such a sinful past and reputation find such favor and acceptance among a chosen people and a Holy God? The answer is found in chapter 2:11, when Rahab professed: “For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” You see, Rahab had accepted the God of the Israelites as her own. She had placed her faith in Him before the spies ever arrived at her home.

Whenever it was that she heard all that God had done for the nation of Israel from the parting of the Red Sea some 40 years earlier to the conquering of the two mighty kings of the Amorites, she realized this God was the only God to be feared and the only God worthy of placing her faith in.

We know this from Hebrews chapter 11 which records many of the great examples of faith recorded in the Bible. The faith of such great people as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the faith of Rahab the Prostitute! That’s right! Rahab is remembered by her faith in this great and mighty God of the Israelites she had heard of and chose to follow. So great was her faith that it was recorded in the book of Hebrews along side those other great patriarchs of the faith.

Rahab is mentioned another time in Scripture, the one time she is not referred to as a prostitute. In Matthew 1:5-6 in the genealogy of Jesus we see the name Rahab: “*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*” Who would ever think that someone with a past like that of Rahab, would be listed in history as a pillar of great faith in God and who would be found worthy to be recorded as an ancestor of King David, not to mention of Jesus, the Savior of the world?

Now if God could change, forgive, accept and use a prostitute like Rahab in such a great way, how could it be that something in our past or our reputation could make us unacceptable or unusable in His Kingdom work today? It is obvious that Rahab had a change of heart and a change of lifestyle when she learned of this great God and she put her faith in Him. The same is true for us.

When we hear about Jesus whom God sent to show us Himself and to die for our sins so that we can be forgiven and cleansed from all of our past, we must make a decision: we either choose to repent (turn from our sin and follow Him), placing our faith in Jesus to lead us, sustain us, and save us from our sin—or we choose to reject Him and to continue to live for ourselves and in our sin. Either way, we will one day reap the eternal consequences of that unavoidable decision. If we choose to repent and place our faith in Him to save us, there is nothing in our past that can keep us from being all that God wants us to be. There is no sin—no matter how secret or how severe, that His blood cannot cleanse! There is no sinner who cannot be made clean and righteous if we trust Him and surrender ourselves to Him.

The Bible says in Isaiah 1:18-20: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are like crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” No matter what others may say, God loves you. He will forgive you, accept you, cleanse and use you—regardless of your past—**if** you will just choose to trust and follow Him. The Bible says: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1John 1:9).

You do not have to be shackled by or remembered for who you were; instead God’s plan for your life through Jesus, is to set you free from your past, free from your sin, and give you eternal life.