

Who Do You Think You Are? (2): Rahab

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[0 : 00] Please keep those pages open. We'll look at them together, and we'll ask God to speak to us through his word as we do that. Our Father, we thank you for your precious word, spoken through the ages, but living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword. And so we pray, our Father, as we have it open before us now, that you would speak so that we would listen. Lord, cut open our hearts, we pray. Let us see what is inside, and let that drive us to Jesus Christ, we ask.

Lord, help us, we pray, to take to heart all your word. For this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, last Sunday, we started a new series, Who Do You Think You Are? Any resemblance to the BBC show of the same name, of course, is incidental. I haven't ripped it off at all. But in a very similar spirit to the show, Who Do You Think You Are?, we want to find out who a very famous person really is by seeing who they come from. We're looking back into the family history of Jesus to see what kind of family Jesus was born into. And fair to say, we got off to a fairly sickening start last week in Genesis chapter 38. We were following, weren't we, Matthew's genealogy.

Five names, five women that he drops in. The first was Tamar. And we saw, it was a bizarre tale. Two little boys conceived in a pop-up brothel by the side of a road by a man you could fairly describe as a thug and his daughter-in-law, who in order to trap him, dressed up as a prostitute in order to seduce him while he was on a work trip. But one of the little boys conceived on that work trip was Perez, who would one day become the distant ancestor of none other than Jesus Christ. You could not make it up, could you? And so the big question is, if that's the family God chose for his son to be born into, then what kind of a person is his son? If that's the family Jesus came from, what kind of family did Jesus come from? And so today we're going to ask those same questions about the second name, the second woman that Matthew drops into his genealogy, the family history of Jesus.

Salmon was the father of Boaz, he writes, whose mother was Rehab. And we see how it was that Rehab became part of the family of God in Joshua chapter 2. And we see here that it all turns on a change of heart.

[3 : 21] Now we pick up the story from the point where Joshua has taken over from Moses as leader of God's people, and he's standing on the border of the promised land with instructions from God to go over the river and claim it. I will give you every place where you set your foot as I promised Moses, God tells Joshua.

So he sends two spies over the border to scope out the land. Who's there? What's the terrain? What are the cities like? Especially the first big city they will hit in the land, Jericho.

So over the spies go, they get to Jericho, and verse 1, entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. Now if you're wondering why they go straight to the house of a prostitute, these places, I'm reliably informed, would have been inns, not only brothels. I guess you could kind of compare it maybe to a seedy motel. Okay, that's not a very nice place, but they're not necessarily there for the wrong reasons. It's a great place perhaps to gather intelligence. Yet in God's providence, whatever we think, Rahab's house turns out to be exactly where the spies need to be. The king of Jericho finds out the spies are there. He gets in touch with Rahab saying, hand them over. These spies are here to spy out our whole land. And that's not a gentle request.

This is like the SS coming to your door in Nazi Germany, demanding at gunpoint that you hand over the Jews that you're hiding in your ceiling. Right? You would need a backbone of steel to send these guys on their way. But that is what she does. She tells the guards at the door, I didn't know who those guys were. They came and they went. I didn't see which way. They go, if you're quick, you might even catch them. And so the guards run off to find the spies. But in fact, Rahab has taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the thatching. And once the guards are gone, she goes up to where she's hidden the spies because she has something to say. And by now, the question

that we should all be screaming is, why did she do that? Why did Rahab hide and protect the spies? What the king has said is completely true, isn't it? They have come to spy out the whole land. They are here to scout out this place from a hostile nation coming to destroy their city. And they are hiding under her roof. You know, we know from recent scandals in Parliament, don't we, how serious, how very serious it is to discover a spy in your house.

[6 : 48] Rahab is a Canaanite living in Canaan. She is not part of God's people. The spies in her house are coming to fight against her people, to live in her country. Why on earth would she not just hand them over? Why does she protect them? Well, that surely is what the spies themselves must be wondering.

And that is what she goes to tell them in verse 9. And as we read these words, just try to imagine being one of these spies. You're deep in enemy territory. You're hiding under the roof of a woman that you do not know, a citizen of a place you're coming to destroy. You hear her climbing up on the roof. You hear her steps across the thatching. And then her voice saying, verse 9, I know that the Lord has given you this land, 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 in fear, and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is God, in heaven above and on the earth below. Would you not listen in open-mouth disbelief?

Is that not the last thing that you would expect to hear on that roof that night, that she has heard the great news of what the Lord Yahweh has done, and she believes that it is true? Not only that, she says, everyone has heard the news and believes it, when we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear, and everyone's courage failed. Now, when I say believes it, maybe you think, you know, in a sort of scared it's going to happen sort of a way, but look, what tense does she use in verse 9?

I know that the Lord will give you this land. No, I know that the Lord has given you this land.

As far as she is concerned, the title deeds have been signed. The fear that has fallen on this city is not the fear of the unknown. It is the fear of what they know is going on. The Lord has given them the land. The only thing left is for his people to come and to claim it. It's not a possibility. It is a certainty. Now, how can they be sure of that? Well, because she says they have heard what the Lord has done in history. They've seen his track record, right? The Exodus, what he did with the sea, parting it so his people could walk through on dry land. All the great battles that they have fought since then, how the Lord has fought for them, taking on formidable kings and completely destroying them from the map. There is no doubt in her mind that their city is next. This is who God is, and this is what he is doing. So back to the question, why does she keep the spies safe?

[10 : 43] Well, so far, we still don't quite know. Right, think about it. The evidence was there for everyone to see. Everyone heard the news. Everyone believed it. Everyone was melting with fear. So that doesn't answer the question why she kept the spies safe. Right, the king had heard the news. The king believed it.

The king was full of fear, but he's not coming waving a white flag. The guards had heard the news. The guards believed it. The guards were full of fear, but they're not telling lies to the king.

So why does Rahab keep them safe? Not simply because she's heard the news. Not simply because she believed it was true, but because of what she does with that knowledge. This is the turning point. In light of what she's heard and believed, she changes sides. She changes sides. Do you see that? What she's heard lead to her to this conclusion? Verse 11. The Lord, your God, is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Your God is God. He is king. There is no other God. He cannot be stopped. No one can stand against him.

It's a confession of faith that would have sounded perfectly orthodox in any Jewish home, but think where it's coming from. A pagan woman in pagan land. And suddenly the gods she's worshipped from her birth are out the window because this God is God. And so she decides her heart should really now belong to him, not her king, not her people.

[12 : 51] Her lie says it all, doesn't it? There's no way around this. She tells a bare-faced lie to the king about the spies.

Right? She says the spies have left when they're hiding in her roof. Now, this isn't here, let me set this aside, to teach us about truth and lies. Normally it is wrong to deceive people, whoever they are.

But when the only choice you have is between obeying and serving the king or obeying and serving God, then what you do is really a test of where your heart lies, isn't it?

Your allegiance. Is your allegiance to the king first or is it to God first? Now, we hope that we will never have to face that choice, but people have done and people do.

And sometimes that involves lying. If this shocks us, think about the underground church. The underground church is underground because they do not want the authorities to know who's part of it.

[14 : 04] But when Christians gather to worship in secret, there is a deceit involved, isn't there? They're keeping it secret for a reason, because their ultimate allegiance is to God, not to human powers.

They will obey him and not the king. Rahab's lie is like that. It is a decision that shows where her allegiance now lies.

Not only did she hear the news about God, not only did she believe it, it was true, not only did she fear, but in response she has turned to serve a new master.

That's true of everyone who responds rightly to the news about the Lord. Our loyalties change, and our choices reflect that.

Very, very rarely, if ever, will we have to lie. But every day, we have to decide who our heart belongs to.

[15 : 11] Who do we serve first? Who is it that we choose each day to obey, and our decisions reflect that? Now the Lord is Rahab's God and king.

Her heart belongs to him, so she serves him before anyone else. She identifies with his people, and she puts her trust in him, verse 12.

Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I've shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign you will spare the lives of my family, and you will save us from death.

When the Lord comes against her city, her king, her people, she asks that she and her family would be spared, that she would be shown chesed for the chesed that she has shown.

It's that word translated kindness in verse 12. But that word is much deeper than simple human kindness. It's the word that elsewhere is used for God's covenant love.

[16 : 26] His unfailing, permanent, unchanging love for his people. So if our brains have not exploded yet, surely this will do it.

That this pagan prostitute in the capital of the anti-God world now speaks in the language of God's covenant to claim covenant love because of her faith in the God of the covenant.

It would be a bit like somebody in Afghanistan or in Iran picking up bits and pieces from Christian radio at home and grasping the whole theology of the cross and praying, God, for the blood of Christ shed on the cross to satisfy your wrath against my sins, please forgive me and save me from death.

And it's even more incredible than that because there is a church in those countries, there is a Christian presence. There has never been a church, so to speak, in Jericho. In the whole land of Canaan, there have been 70 Christians 450 years ago.

Yet here's this woman who's heard of God by word of mouth from people who hate him, probably her clients. And here she is claiming covenant love for her and her family and asking to be saved.

[17 : 57] Can we get our heads around this? It's a stunning moment in the Old Testament. I don't think there's anything like this before or for a long time after.

When somebody so far outside the boundary of God's people comes in because she has heard the news about God, believes it, and belongs to him.

And so what makes Rahab such an unlikely woman to find in Jesus' family is that it was so unlikely that she would ever know God at all. Humanly speaking, she did not stand a chance of hearing, let alone believing, let alone turning, let alone trusting in him and becoming part of his church.

There were hundreds or thousands of people in Jericho who heard the news and believed that it was true, but did not respond in the way that she did.

There were probably plenty of other seedy motels that the spies could have gone to and Rahab would never have met or spoken with God's people at all. But we are not speaking humanly, are we?

[19 : 26] In God's plan, Rahab did hear and believe and turn and trust and speak with God's people and was saved. It's an incredible change of heart that could only have been planned and purposed by God that a woman so far outside was simply waiting for someone to lead her to salvation.

And if this sounds too good to be true, you only need to look at the people around you. To see that this still happens today. And it is just as miraculous.

Some of you know yourselves, you came from a place of knowing virtually nothing about the God of the Bible. Jesus was just a name to you. But you knew enough that you wanted to speak with a Christian.

You knew enough that it brought you into a church. But suddenly the bits and pieces that you had started to fall into place. And the more bits and pieces you picked up, the more the picture grew until you knew who it was you were dealing with.

The true and living God and his son, Jesus Christ. And you heard the good news of what this God had done for you in history. How he came down from heaven.

[20 : 55] Was incarnate, born a baby, lived a sinless life. Died on the cross for your sins. Rose again to give you eternal life. You heard it.

You believed that it was true. But here's the miracle. Not that you heard. Not that you believed.

But what you did with it. That you recognized this God as God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That you turned from following the way of the world. Your own desires. And started serving and obeying him. And that on the back of who you knew he had said he was.

And what he said he had done for you. You asked him to show you his grace. To pour out his love on you. To save you from eternal death.

[21 : 53] You know, I have seen changes of heart like that in here. And it is nothing short of a miracle.

It is watching a resurrection happen. Someone dead to sin becomes alive in Christ. Friends, do you believe that can happen?

Humanly, it is impossible. But God does it. He can take someone who lives in a place or in a home with no Christians. And reach them with his gospel.

And give them a new heart. And save them. In fact, not only can he do that. He loves to do that.

And yes, we do have a part in that.

Like these spies. We honestly don't go out into our week. Do we expecting conversations like this? They certainly did not enter Jericho thinking that they would promise salvation to somebody in there.

[22 : 56] But how much more should we get ready for God to work in people's lives in ways that we would not expect? You get ready for him to bring people in who you would not think could possibly respond rightly to Christ.

Who is it? Who is it in your life? In your family? The people you work with? Friends? People on your course? People you haven't met yet?

Who's hearing the gospel? Who's responding to it? It's our carol service in two weeks. Who wouldn't you invite?

Because when anyone, anyone at all, hears, believes, turns, and trusts in the Lord to save them, he 100% will. That is his heart.

And we see that in our second and our last point this morning. A promise kept. The spies give Rahab a sign in verse 18, a scarlet cord hanging from her window.

[24 : 04] So she ties that scarlet cord in her window and the spies go back over the border. They report back to Joshua, verse 24. The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands.

All the people are melting in fear because of us. In short, everything's going to plan. But what about Rahab? It's a bit of a cliffhanger. Because the people don't get back to Jericho for another four chapters.

Chapter 6. They get back and begin to claim the land. The Lord tells them to march round and round, shouting, blowing trumpets. But what about Rahab?

They do that for six days. On the seventh day, the walls collapse. People go in and begin to kill everyone. But what about Rahab? Were we right all along?

In our hearts, this woman really was too far gone. Too lost. Too small a person. In too big and bad a world.

Like Joshua, he does not forget his promise to save those who have put their trust in him, even the ones and twos in a world full of sin.

So let me encourage you, if you haven't yet, to turn to Jesus and take Rahab's words as your own. Lord, you are God in heaven above and on the earth below.

[31 : 41] Please save me from death. And if your trust is in him to do that, he will. The church has never been anything else than a family of people like that.

Nothing more than a family of outsiders who've been brought in. We heard at the very start of our service what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, still true of every Christian today. Once he said, you were separate from Christ.

You were excluded from citizenship in Israel. You were strangers to the covenants of promise. You were without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

You know, if you're a Christian today, you know that that is true of you, that you are not here because of who you are. That is not what has saved you, but like Rahab hanging the scarlet cord from her window, it is the fact that you have claimed the blood of Christ and painted it over your life. Without his blood, we might as well have been anyone in Jericho that day, suffering destruction, dying by the edge of the sword with his blood.

[33 : 08] We are all Rahab, the unclean outsider, saved and brought into the family of God through the death of his son, Jesus Christ.

And if that is the family he came from, then we are the family he came for, a family of outsiders, saved by his unfailing grace and covenant love.

Let's thank him together as we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.