

Inspire Series #4 – Rahab

Faith in Action

If you remember before mission's month, I was in the middle of a series of some of the most inspiring stories the Bible has to share. We looked at the courage of Esther, the way Nehemiah faced and overcame opposition, the discipline of Daniel long before he faced the lion's den.

Next, we're going to look at one of the most inspiring women in the Bible. Her name was Rahab. She had an opportunity to put faith into action and she did just that. Her story is recorded in the book of Joshua. Joshua was the successor of Moses, and the one who would actually lead the people into the Promised Land. Or more accurately, lead them to take it. As soon as Joshua led the people into the land, the first city they encountered was a city called Jericho.

In case you are interested Archaeology states that Jericho was a real city. It is on the West Bank of Palestine. It is claimed that Jericho is the oldest city in the world. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus passed through Jericho where he healed blind beggars (Matthew 20: 29) and Luke's Gospel records the story of the tax collector Zacchaeus. The road between Jerusalem and Jericho is the setting for the story of the good Samaritan.

Rahab lived in that city. She also worked there as a prostitute. Her story is recorded in the book of Joshua: Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, **"Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho." So, the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night. (Joshua 2:1, NLT)**

That's how her story begins. The conflict between the people of Israel and the people of Jericho had begun. It's was going to be war. Joshua sends out two spies. But it wasn't for a sexual encounter. A little background. In those days they didn't have Hotels, motels or air BNB's. They had roadside inns that were, most of the time, brothels. Which is why most people, when they travelled, stayed with friends or relatives.

And why, if you've read much of the New Testament particularly the book of Acts, one of the ministries of the early church was to take in travellers so that they wouldn't have to stay in an inn. But these guys were spies. Israelites in a foreign land. So, they had no relatives, and nowhere to stay, but the local inn.

Which was, as was typical, also a functioning brothel. And that's where they met Rahab. It would seem she not only worked there as a prostitute, but as we'll see, ran the entire operation as its madame. Her establishment was actually built into the outer wall of the city. There was a reason for that. In ancient near eastern culture, prostitutes were tolerated but

not socially accepted. They were the lowest rung on the social ladder. There would never have been hope for a husband.

In fact, it was forbidden to marry a prostitute or someone who had been one. So, once they entered that world, it was almost impossible to leave it. Which begins to tell us why she lived in a wall. Because of their social standing, they were often forced to live on the outskirts of town, or by the walls of the town.

That was Rahab's life. Not much of a future. Not much hope. Until she was given a chance to do something. To make a choice. Let's read about it: **2...someone told the king of Jericho, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." 3 So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: "Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land." 4 Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, "Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn't know where they were from. 5 They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don't know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them." 6 (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.) 7 So the king's men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king's men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut. (Joshua 2:2-7, NLT)**

Now that was a brave move. She defied the king, risking her very life, to protect the spies - thinking fast on her feet with a clever lie that bought time and created a diversion. And by the way, for some of you if her lying bothers you well, I would have lied too. There are times when I think it would be appropriate to lie. If someone broke into my house, waving a gun, saying, "I'm here to kill everyone in this house. Are you alone?" Do you think I'm going to tell the truth about my granddaughter asleep in a room.? Or that my wife is hiding in the closet? No way! I'm going to lie through my teeth.

So, she lied to protect two spies from certain death. Rahab risked everything to save these men. But that's not all. What happens next is more incredible than it may seem on the surface. Let me read on: **8 Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. 9 "I know the LORD has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. 10 For we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed. 11 No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below. (Joshua 2:8-11, NLT)**

First, she says, "I know that God has given you this land." She makes a strong statement of belief in God. She recounts some of the miraculous interventions of God in Israel's life. Then comes her incredible statement of faith. For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below. Faith was her driver. She was motivated by faith to act. Not bad for a pagan prostitute. She confesses that their God is the supreme God.

She didn't want to be a prostitute. She was trying not to be a prostitute. If you're wondering how I know that it is because she hid the spies under bundles of flax on her roof. Bundles of

flax was something that women who were the poorest of the poor were allowed to harvest. This took enormous hours of work and was her way of trying to break out of the economic cycle she was in selling her body, to find a different way to live.

So, what happens next? She just asks the spies to remember her. To just let her and her family live. She never asks for a reward; never asks to be accepted. She only asks to be allowed to live and to spend her life chasing after this God. Let me read it: **12 “Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that 13 when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families.” 14 “We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety,” the men agreed. “If you don’t betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the LORD gives us the land.” 15 Then, since Rahab’s house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window. (Joshua 2:12-15m NLT)**

And the rest, as they say, is history. The spies escaped. Joshua came to Jericho. And if you know anything about that event, you know that they circled it seven times, blew some horns, and God caved in the walls.

Every wall, that is, but one. If you’re familiar with the story, have you ever thought of that? Jericho was defeated by God destroying the walls. Rahab lived in the wall, but was saved. So, you can imagine the scene: there were the city’s walls all caved, except for one small section. The one that had been the brothel where Rahab and her family lived.

What an incredible and supernatural thing to witness if you were there. And because of her decision, the people of Israel entered the Promised Land. What is it that really set Rahab apart? Just a quick lie and the hiding of two men? No. There’s way more to it than that. Because what Rahab did, and the way it turned her life around and other lives since, is heralded throughout the Bible.

Do you know she is one of the most talked about women in all of Scripture? Her story is told over and over. And it’s always the same angle to the story. The same elements. The same dynamics that set her apart. Here it is: Belief resulting in action. Here’s how it’s talked about in the New Testament book of James: **14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? 15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16 and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well” — but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? 17 So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. 18 Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.” 19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. 20 How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless? 21 Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. 23**

And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. 24 So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. 25 Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. 26 Just as the body is dead without breath, so also

This is why Rahab is celebrated in the Bible. She had belief and she took action. She stepped out in light of that faith, ...because of that faith, ...with that faith. Faith fuelled her action, and her actions were fuelled by faith. And it changed her life.

Here’s the rest of her story: Joshua, chapter six: **20 When the people heard the sound of the rams’ horns, they shouted as loud as they could. Suddenly, the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the Israelites charged straight into the town and captured it... 22 Meanwhile, Joshua said to the two spies, “Keep your promise. Go to the prostitute’s house and bring her out, along with all her family.” 23 The men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and all the other relatives who were with her. They moved her whole family to a safe place near the camp of Israel... 25 So Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute and her relatives who were with her in the house, because she had hidden the spies Joshua sent to Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day. (Joshua 6:20, 22-23, 25, NLT)**

Now, did you catch that last line? Because it’s important. Not only was she saved, but lived among the Israelites as one of them. For the first time in her life, she was fully accepted. No longer an outcast. She found out that this God wasn’t just powerful, but grace-filled and forgiving. Even to a prostitute.

James 2: 14-16

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In the same way, 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? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

And in the book of Hebrews, where it lists the great people of faith throughout all of biblical history – so much so it’s called the “faith” hall of fame chapter in the Bible – she shows up again! Let me read what it says: **Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. 2 Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation... 26 And then it begins a listing, a who’s who of faith – ...here are some samples: 7 It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood... 8 It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going... 29 It was by faith that the people of Israel went right through the Red Sea as though they were on dry ground... So name after name, story after story, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses,... But then there’s one more: 31 It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. (Hebrews 11:1-2, 7, 8, 29, 31, NLT)**

But that’s still not all about Rahab in the Bible. Here’s the coolest thing of all. And probably the thing most easily missed. The book of Matthew gives an account of the life of Jesus, the first of four biographies in the New Testament. Matthew opens up in an interesting way. He gives a genealogy. A family tree. He starts off writing this: **Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers... (Matthew 1:2, NLT)** And he keeps going like that, generation after generation. Until we read this: **5 Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse. 6 Jesse was the father of King David. (Matthew 1:5-6, NLT)**

Rahab the prostitute got married! Remember, you weren’t allowed to marry prostitutes, even former prostitutes. So, what happened? That wasn’t how God viewed her anymore. She was a new creation in Him. Forgiven, accepted, restored. But even that’s not all. Rahab’s son was the husband of one of the most revered women of the Bible, Ruth, who has a whole book named after her in the Old Testament.

And even that’s not all. From Rahab’s family line, came none other than King David himself. But even that’s not all. Here’s how Matthew ends the family tree of Rahab: After multiple more generations, he writes: Eleazar was the father of Matthan. Matthan was the father of Jacob. 16 Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah. (Matthew 1:15-16, NLT) So our Rahab was an ancestor of Jesus, part of the direct family line. No longer a prostitute, ...but a woman heralded for faith and deeds, ...delivering the Promised Land to Israel, ...and fully redeemed from her previous life, ...marrying, having a child, ...starting a family line that would one day provide the family for the saviour of the world. Jesus Himself. All from choosing to believe, and acting on it.