

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 <sup>[a]</sup> named Rahab and stayed there.

2 The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." 3 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."

4 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. 5 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." 6 (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) 7 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.

8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof 9 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. 10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea <sup>[b]</sup> 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. <sup>[c]</sup> 11 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. 12 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 13 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."

14 "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."

15 So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. 16 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."

17 The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us 18 unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. 19 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 who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. 20 But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

21 "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.

22 When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. 23 Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. 24 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."

-- Joshua 2

Broad. Adjective, adverb, noun. Of great breadth. Example: *The river was too broad to swim across.* Measurement from side to side: Example: *The tree was two feet broad.* Liberal. Tolerant. Example: *A broad interpretation of the law tempers justice with mercy.* Slang. Usually offensive: A woman. In particular, a promiscuous woman. Example: *Rahab*

When I was a kid, I read and re-read the story of Rahab and the spies from the perspective of the Picture Bible. It was a valuable gift since I learned most of my Bible stories out of it, but one of the problems with the Picture Bible is that it depicts women—all women—with a particular bias. Mary, Deborah, Ruth, Jezebel, Sarah, Eve—all the women were beautiful and had perfect bone structure to go along with glowing skin and shiny hair. Rahab the prostitute was no exception.

Now that I've grown up a little and have seen a few different sides of life, I don't imagine Rahab as being as pure or virginal as the Picture Bible made her out to be. These days I imagine her as the text makes her out to be, for her name in Hebrew means "broad"—though I think her "broadness" in Joshua 2 is coincidental, not

intentional. Still, I think she was a broad: a tough, toothless, used-up old woman who's used to doing anything to survive. She's not the kind of woman that appears on the cover of Cosmo or bakes two dozen cookies for her daughter's class bake sale. She's the miserable woman on the corner with her skirt pulled up high, waiting to turn another trick so her family can eat.

Rahab sticks out like a sore thumb in the narrative. A woman in a highly patriarchal culture. A prostitute whom nice ladies look down on and treat like trash. A dweller on the edge of the city—inside the wall itself. And a member of the tribe of people who were to be exterminated by the Israelites. Though we may not have all the same characteristics as her, the story of Rahab and the two spies is the story of us all. She is the ultimate outsider to the covenant people of God—and yet, by an act of mercy, she is brought in.

God's proclamation to Joshua in chapter 1 holds true throughout the entire book: *"have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged. For the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."* (v.9) The question of the book of Joshua is "who fights the battle? Who wins the land? Is it the strength of Israel, or is it Yahweh the Warrior?" The answers can be found in the tale of the Jericho conquest.

The story begins as the mantle of power has passed down from Moses to Joshua, and Israel now is perched on the banks of the Jordan, waiting to cross. In an act of wise military leadership, Joshua sends two spies to gather intelligence about Jericho—perhaps symbolic of how he and Caleb spied out Canaan as young men forty years

before. It's no secret that the Israelites are in the neighbourhood—after all, word about what they did to King Sihon and King Og has spread all around the region. Now, a million strong, they're camped on Canaan's doorstep, battle-hardened and eager to claim the land promised to them.

It isn't long before the two spies find themselves in a disreputable establishment, a place where everyone's a stranger and no one asks too many questions. Some commentators like to airbrush the House of Rahab into an inn and Rahab into an innkeeper, but it makes better sense of the kind of God Yahweh is, if a prostitute is brought into the story. Her very presence in the story reminds us that God uses all kinds of people, not just the clean and dignified folks we often find inhabiting churches. There's no illusion about who Rahab is—she's a whore—but she's also a survivor.

Of course, when the natives find out they're being spied on, they send men out to Rahab's. And if there was any doubt left as to what paid Rahab's bills, vv. 2-3 are rife with sexual connotations. What we read in English as "the ones who came to you and entered your house" in Hebrew reads "the ones who *entered* you and entered your house." Rahab the quick-thinking broad sends the King's men in the opposite direction before making a deal with the spies to save her family. The deal is this: keep the red rope in your window, and your household will be saved.

We know the end of the story, one where Israel uses the supposedly brilliant battle plan of marching around a city blowing trumpets to conquer it. Although some have speculated that the noise from a quarter million soldiers (plus trumpets) would be enough to break down the walls, the truth is that the tactic was as absurd then as it is

now. Thus we have our answer about who it is that does the fighting and gives the land: not Israel, but Yahweh. It is Yahweh alone who gives the land, a gift of grace for a nation of slaves—and what’s more, it is done with the involvement of the ultimate outsider, who not only becomes an instrument of divine grace, but a celebrated part of the narrative.

You see, Rahab’s story doesn’t just end with her being tucked away in the outskirts of the Israelite encampment. Later, she marries into the clan of Judah and has a son named Boaz, a nice guy who marries Ruth. And Ruth? She’s an outsider too, a widow and a Moabite—but she gives birth to Obed. Obed then has a boy named Jesse, and Jesse, as you may know, has eight sons, the youngest of which is a runty little shepherd named David. David then rises up from obscurity in the fields to become Israel’s greatest king, establishing his bloodline all the way down to a tradesman named Joseph—whose adopted son Yeshua is the one we know as Jesus.

The marvel of the story of Rahab is that even though she was the ultimate outsider who was perpetually banished to the periphery, she is included in the story of God just as much as one who was born flesh and blood as an Israelite. This is how the story of Rahab is the story of us all. For we, like Rahab, were all outsiders to the grace of God and his covenant community, but by an act of grace, we are all brought in. Those who are in Christ are now within the circle of the new covenant.

In this day and age, a popular thing to say is that “*I like Jesus, but I hate the Church.*” And we, in our tolerant individualistic laissez-faire “I’m a nice guy” ways, never seek to challenge that such a statement might be completely against the heart of God.

For we see in the way God brings Rahab into his covenant people, that God is not out to simply redeem a single person, but is making for Himself a beloved people. When God makes a new covenant with humanity through Christ, he is promising that we have citizenship *together* in his Kingdom. Yet sometimes, our stumbling block is the same as it ever was: Christ. Though we may like the idea of a clean, good-looking Anglo-Saxon Jesus, we often find ourselves at odds with His Body, the Church. How can this be? How can we sing praise songs and pray in the name of one who we say we adore, and yet call his Beloved Bride unworthy?<sup>1</sup> And so she is: the People of God never deserve to experience a relationship with God—but that’s why it’s called unmerited grace.

Yet, the key is that this unworthy one is made up of unworthy ones: outsiders, losers, sinners all. It is a truism that the Church will never be the full reflection of the Kingdom of God, yet its people, the ones who have hurt us and who snub us and who regularly fail to extend their hands in friendship to us—these are the people God loves and calls to be His own. When we say we want to be close to God, we must also say that we want to be close to Jesus—and one of the ways we get to know who Jesus is, is to begin to know the people he loves. Yes, we must all attend to the direct encounter we have with God, but we were never meant for relationship with God alone, but also for right relationships with each other—the broken, the disaffected, the very unheroic—the People of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Eph 5:25-31

We sometimes get the impression that churches ought to be like a mirror—clean, smooth, and reflective of our own image. Yet as we all know, life together as those who are found in Christ quickly demands that we change the idol we make of what Paul calls the Body of Christ. *“If only this church didn’t have so many people I’ve fought with. If only this church didn’t have so many people I secretly resented. If only this church didn’t have so many powermongers, comfortniks, and general weirdoes. If this church didn’t have so many gosh darned sinners in it, then maybe I could see myself a part of them.* Yet this *is* the Body of Christ—wounded but whole. If you would follow Christ, you must learn to embrace this wounded Body, for all of this—all of us—are the Master’s beautiful Bride.

- 1.) How is your perception of God changing?
- 2.) How is your perception of who the People of God are being changing?
- 3.) Describe a time when you had to work through bitterness against the Church. How are you working through it?