

“Saved by Faith”

Hebrews 11:30-31, Joshua 2:1-24

Intro: This morning as we open God’s Word we will be looking once again to Hebrews 11 as we continue studying this great Hall of Faith. This series of sermons will not end today and will extend further than originally expected. However, after today we are going to take a break for a little bit. I will begin a sermon series next week that centers around the birth of Christ, and then we will have a major church-wide emphasis in the beginning of 2019. Then, when the Lord leads, we will likely pick up “Greater Things” again in the Spring.

Throughout the course of our study we have been reminded of one key truth repeatedly. The truth is that we must live by faith. When we do so, we discover that God can do extraordinary things through very ordinary people. **Ephesians 3:20** reminds us that God is “able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” There is absolutely nothing that God can’t do. With Him all things are possible. My hope through every sermon of this series is that we have been reminded of the greatness of God. It is easy sometimes when studying these saints of old for us to become star-struck and think they just had it all figured out and were amazing. The truth, though, is that the reason they were recorded in Scripture is not so much about their amazing abilities or expertise, but simply because they believed God and walked in faith. It is very important for us to remember this today because this is exactly what God is calling us to do.

The fact is that Hebrews 11 gives us a list of these saints of old, and it almost sounds more like a “Who’s Who” list of amazing believers. Think of it. This week the College Football Playoff Committee will meet to determine who gets into the playoffs. If we were on a committee trying to determine who makes the list in Hebrews 11, we would all agree unanimously. We read of Noah, who built an ark when he had never seen rain. Then there’s Abraham, who left his hometown to follow God into the great unknown. Then he offered, arguably, the most costly sacrifice ever. Then there’s Enoch, who walked so closely with God that he pleased God and he never even died. What about Joseph, who trusted God even though he went through trial after trial. Then we learn about Moses, who courageously stood up to Pharaoh and delivered the Israelites from Egypt. Later we will learn about Gideon, who defeated the masses with just a rag-tag group of men. We’ll learn about David. He was the man after God’s own heart, who defeated Goliath, who defeated 10,000s, and eventually became king. This group sounds amazing, even a little intimidating. After all, how many of us have built an ark, stood before an enormous giant, courageously rebuked a pagan king, or left our comforts to go follow God to a land that He would show us?

It is easy to see why these people are on the list. But today we are going to study the life of a person who frankly seems out of place. If you are just considering the great accomplishments of the others, it would seem that this person has no business even being hinted at. From man’s perspective, it makes absolutely no sense to include this person on this list. She brings no major accomplishment to the table. She has very little to offer to the discussion. She wasn’t even an Israelite. She did not live for the true and living God of heaven. She wasn’t known for her greatness. However, God in His wisdom and omniscience saw fit to include her in this great Hall of Faith. Why? Simply put,

because it wasn't about some great accomplishment in her life, but rather about Who she placed her faith in and what He did as a result.

Show Texts

When we last looked at Hebrews 11, we studied the life of Moses. We were reminded of how God raised him up to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. God had promised the Israelites the land of Canaan, so they went to claim it. However, something tragic happened. Moses sent out spies to evaluate the land. When the spies returned, they were discouraged and defeated. The majority were terrified and walked by sight instead of faith. They quickly doubted God's promises, discouraged the people, and led them to walk in fear. The end result was that God caused the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until the doubting generations had all died. Though Moses himself didn't doubt, due to his own stubbornness and disobedience God didn't allow Moses to enter the promised land either. So by the time we pick up the passage today, Joshua is now leading the Israelites. They are now moving forward to claim the land and the promise that God had given more than 40 years ago. Joshua had a strategy in mind for claiming the land. His strategy centered around conquering the mighty city of Jericho. Jericho was a fortified city, completely surrounded by impenetrable walls. Joshua knew that God was going to give them the city of Jericho, but he was unsure how. So, he sent out two specific spies to go look over the city of Jericho. It is there, in the midst of the Israelites' mission to claim Jericho, that we are introduced to the main character of this morning's message – Rahab.

I can't state enough the profound implications of Hebrews 11:31. It seems understandable to us that the Father of Many Nations – Abraham, the Man after God's own heart – David, the man who spoke to God face to face – Moses, the man who walked with God – Enoch, etc. would all be listed in this great Hall of Faith. But Rahab? A prostitute? Really, God? What is so important about this? What is so significant about her? I want us to take in five key observations from this encounter with Rahab and then in the end I want us to see three key takeaways.

I. The Sinful Condition (vs. 1)

The Bible tells us that the two spies went to Jericho and they apparently needed a place to lodge. It was getting late and the gates of the city were about to be closed. There was nowhere for them to go, so they needed a place to stay. They found a safe place in the home of a woman named Rahab. The Bible doesn't sugarcoat or water down the truth of Rahab's sinful condition. In fact, in both passages that we have read today we see her immediately described as a harlot. In Joshua 2 it literally tells us in the first verse and in Hebrews 11:31 it is the first phrase used to describe her. She is first noted as "a harlot." Needless to say, this is not what one would want to be known for. This is telling us what her normal practice in life was. As a harlot, she opened her home to any and all who desired to be there. She did whatever was requested and desired by men in order to make money. She didn't value herself and sold her body, giving temporary pleasure to others in exchange for whatever she could get. The fact that she is referred to as a "harlot" implies clearly that she was sexually involved with men outside of the bonds of marriage. By the way, it is important for us to remember still in 2018, God's plan for sex is that it is a gift to be enjoyed within the context of marriage. It's not for those who "feel" married, want to be married, intend to be

married, or are in a committed relationship “like” marriage. It is for those who ARE married. Anything outside of that is a cheap substitute and a sin against God. Think of the reality. God is the One who created sex, giving it both its purpose and its pleasure, and then gives us the guidelines so that it can be wonderful and fulfilling. However, so many, from their own selfish desires and agendas, look at God and say, “I’ll do what I want to.” In doing so they reject the very One who created sex for His glory and our good. Rahab was in this situation. The description is showing us that this was her normal lifestyle.

The description in Hebrews 11, though, takes it further. By referring to her as “the harlot” we discover that this was not only her lifestyle, but her very identity. This is what she was known and ultimately remembered for. We aren’t told exactly how the Israelite men found her home. We don’t know if this was their initial strategy to successfully hide from the guards. The woman of the home only cared that the fee was paid, she didn’t care about much else, so this would have been a safe bet for these guys to hide out. Perhaps they asked someone in the streets. Perhaps she stood out in the doorway in a suggestive nature trying to lure any susceptible prey, like the woman in Proverbs 7. We don’t know for sure. We simply know that they ended up at the very house of the least likely candidate to possibly be of help to these men of God – someone known and recognized for her immorality.

It is at this point that it would be easy for us in our own self-righteousness to look down at her. We would wonder, “Who does she think she is? What is she doing? Why are they talking to her? Why don’t they just ignore her?” But, it is also at this very point that I need to remind us of something. All of those other great heroes from Hebrews 11 were far from perfect. In fact, they were sinners, too. Their sin may not have been as public and well-known as Rahab’s, but it wasn’t any less sinful and God Himself saw it. Great Father Abraham, he got impatient with God and slept with his wife’s handmaiden. He also lied on at least a few occasions that we know of. David, the giant killer, committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband murdered. Noah, the boat builder, was so desperate and depressed that he got plastered drunk. Moses, the friend of God, got so enraged that he killed an Egyptian man. Even Joseph got impatient with God and tried to work his own plan instead of trusting God’s plan. My point is that every single one of the people listed in Hebrews 11 had the same problem. They were all sinners. They all messed up. They all blew it at one point or another. Even the noblest among them was imperfect and fell short of the glory and the greatness of God. By the way, friends, we are in the same boat. Look in the mirror for a moment. It might be easy for us to point a finger at Rahab and accuse her of sinning, but in doing so we must be careful not to ignore the sobering reality that we, too, are sinners. **Romans 3:10 & 23** says it plainly, “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one’...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That sad reality describes every single one of us. It certainly described Rahab as well. We are thankful, though, that God in His providence directed the men exactly where they needed to be. Was she a sinner? Yes, but all sinners need the opportunity to learn about the true and living God.

II. The Serious Crisis (vs. 2-7)

We will discuss why she accepted these strangers in just a moment, but in the meantime I want us to grasp what was going on. These spies have likely assumed that they have successfully made

their way to a safe place. Perhaps nobody heard the difference in their accent, saw the uniqueness of their garments, or recognized their various distinctions. So, they begin to settle in for some rest, but little did they know, they had certainly been discovered. Jericho was one of many “city-states” in Canaan that was ruled by a king. It didn’t take long for the word to get to the king that there were spies in the city. In fact, verse 2 says that they said, “Tonight they came to search out the land, and now they are at the harlot’s home.” The king was furious. He immediately sent a messenger to Rahab saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you and entered your house.” Do you hear what he is saying? He is saying, “Rahab, we know that they are with you. We know that they are in your house. Bring them out at once because they are coming to harm us.” Please understand that Rahab is in a crisis.

Rahab was certainly in a physical crisis. She could turn these spies in, but that was no guarantee that she still wouldn’t be harmed. Or, she could take her life in her own hands and hide them. Either way, physically she is in a crisis. But more importantly, she was in a spiritual crisis. She was in a crisis of belief. This is a deciding moment in her life. This is one of those moments when she had to draw a line in the sand and determine whose side she was on. She could obey the king, turn in these band of God’s people who would then be killed, or she could deny the edict of the king and seek to honor God. Notice clearly what she did.

As Rahab faced this crisis, she made a clear decision. She took the Israelite spies and hid them. In fact, she had already taken them up on the roof of her house. On the roof, she had stalks of flax that were laying out, so they would be baked and dried by the sun. They were all stacked up and spread out. We get the impression that she had them lay down and then she covered them. But that isn’t all she did. She told the king’s messengers, “Yes, the men did come to my house, but they already left and fled the city. I bet if you hurry to pursue them, you can catch them and do what you want to.” So, the king’s messengers immediately took off to find and catch these Israelite spies. She has faced a major crisis and she has now just put her own life on the line. She didn’t know how long it would take for the guards to realize that they had been misled. It was only a matter of time before they discovered the truth. Even though she couldn’t see how all of this was going to work out, she didn’t know what was going to become of her future, she didn’t know what was to become of these Israelite men – she looked at this crisis and stood FOR the Israelites and AGAINST her own king.

III. The Shaping Conviction (vs. 8-11)

Doesn’t this seem so strange? Why would she risk her own life for people that she had never met before? Why would she risk her own life and her future for these strangers who represent a people group that is spying out her land to claim it as their own? From man’s perspective it makes very little sense. But, when we consider what was really going on in her heart and life, it makes perfect sense. The Bible makes it clear that God was doing something in her life that nobody else knew about. We see this powerfully in what she said to the spies. Before they went to sleep for the night, she had to tell them what was on her heart. There were some convictions that had been forming in her life that were beginning to shape the course of her life. She had three convictions:

First, she said, "I know that the Lord has given you the land." She and all the people of Jericho had been hearing about the Israelites. It defied logic to see this group of people defeating the mighty armies all throughout the land. What the Israelites were experiencing and accomplishing was supernatural. Rahab didn't know every detail, but she knew something profound. She knew that Israel was great because the God of Israel was great. Israel was victorious because the God that Israel knew and worshipped was giving them victory. He was working on their behalf. She saw that God was going to give them all the land of the region. The king wasn't too concerned about the possibility. After all, nobody had ever defeated mighty Jericho. How would the Israelites ever penetrate the mighty walls of the city? For man it was impossible, but Rahab wasn't considering man's power. She was thinking of God's power and concluded that it was inevitable. God was going to destroy the enemy and give the land to His people.

Second, she said, "We know that the Lord is working on your behalf." It was one thing for the Israelites to have these great military victories, but she thinks back even before that. She remembered how their God delivered them from bondage in Egypt. She had heard of the plagues that God sent, the leader that God had raised up in Moses, and the way that God worked on behalf of His people. Additionally, Rahab and the other residents of Jericho heard about how God had worked through the Red Sea to allow His people to cross the middle of the sea on dry ground and then, in the middle of that same sea, He drowned Pharaoh and his entire army. Notice Rahab said, "We have heard how the Lord did this." This event took place 40 years earlier, but they still remembered and recognized that God was doing this amazing work on Israel's behalf. As a result, the people of Jericho were terrified. They were a much stronger army than Israel, and certainly a greater number of people with greater resources, but they knew that they were no match for the God of Israel. Rahab clearly stated this conviction. There is one final point of conviction.

Her shaping conviction is seen in one powerful, summary statement about the God of Israel. In **Joshua 2:11b** she said, "for the Lord your God, He IS God in heaven above and on earth beneath." This is her personal statement of faith. She had come to believe that the God of Israel was the One who had power and dominion over all the world. She is basically saying, "Jehovah, your God, Whom you worship and call upon is so far above all other gods that He is the only true God because He is Lord over all of heaven and over all the earth." She understood that heaven wasn't above His power and nothing on earth was below His awareness and understanding. As a result, she now looked at their God and identified Him as her own God.

This explains why she did what she did. Why did she receive these strangers from Israel? Because she had faith in their God. Why did she risk her own life instead of the lives of the strangers from Israel? Because she had faith in their God and trusted that He would spare her. Please understand that she didn't know everything there was to know about the true God of heaven. Her knowledge was very minimal. A five-year-old growing up today in a Christian home has more knowledge about God than she did. She didn't know about the covenant God made with Abraham. She didn't yet know the details of the coming Savior. She knew very little, but with the little she knew, she responded in faith and acted on it. Oddly enough, she displayed greater faith with the few nuggets of truth she knew than the combined faith of the 10 spies from 40 years earlier. **Warren Wiersbe** summarized it well, "She believed in one God, not in the multitude of gods that populated the

heathen temples. She believed He was a personal God, Who would work on behalf of those who trusted Him.” She risked her life and blessed the spies because she had faith in God and trusted Him. This was her shaping conviction.

IV. **The Sincere Concern (vs. 12-14)**

Now that she has expressed her faith in God, she states her concern. She has a great burden and a great request. She was burdened for herself and her family to be saved and rescued from the coming judgment of God. She knew that Jehovah was the true God because she had heard of the amazing wonders He had done. She was also afraid of what was to come next because the Israelites were obviously coming closer and closer to Jericho. So, because of her faith in God she welcomed these spies and pleaded with them for the salvation of her family. I think it should be clearly stated that those who grasp the greatness of God, His faithfulness to His promises, and the consequences of rejecting Him always have a deep concern for their own relationship with Him and for the relationships of those closest to us. When we realize God’s grace and compassion and when we realize how God judges those who reject Him, it certainly causes us to act in urgency and desperation to cry out to God by faith to save us. **Matthew Henry** said it this way, “Those who truly believe the divine revelation concerning the ruin of sinners and the promise of heaven to God’s children, will give diligence to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold of eternal life, by joining themselves to God and to His people.” Rahab was doing this, but it didn’t end there. Rahab wasn’t just thinking about her own welfare.

Now that she had experienced God’s mercy, she was burdened to rescue her family. This should be the case for every single one of us. Have you cried out to God to save you? If so, what are you now doing so that your family and friends are rescued from the judgment to come? I’m reminded of Andrew in John 1:35-42. As soon as he met Jesus, what did he do? He immediately went and found his brother Peter and brought him to Jesus. I’m reminded of the Philippian jailer. After a dramatic moment and near-death experience, the jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. This is for you and your household.” What did the jailer do? He immediately took Paul and Silas to his house to share the truth of the Gospel and that night everyone in the house believed in Jesus and was saved. Even the cleansed leper in Mark 1:40-45 went back home and told everyone he met what Jesus had done for him. The woman at the well in John 4 did the same. The point is that those who have saving faith have a deep concern about the salvation of those around them. **Proverbs 11:30** says it well, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls.” Rahab was certainly in this boat. She was deeply concerned about the life and salvation of her family.

V. **The Saving Command (vs. 15-21)**

The Israelite spies assured Rahab that they would deal kindly with her, as she had done for them. Since she knew the area better and knew where the officers had just left to search, she gave them specific instructions on what they were to do in order to return safely to their camp. Then the Israelite men gave a promise, an oath to Rahab. This promise was her opportunity to be saved. This promise was extended to her and to her family if they would accept and believe her word. They basically said this, “Death and destruction is coming to Jericho, but you and your family can

be spared and saved if you will believe and act on what we tell you to do. This scarlet thread, which you are using to let us escape by, will be your rescue as well. When we leave, tie this cord of scarlet red thread in the window, and gather all your family here. When we come back to conquer Jericho, we will look for the scarlet thread. The presence of this thread will show us that you, and all your family with you in the house, have truly believed in the God of Israel. Your lives will be saved and rescued. But, if the scarlet thread isn't applied and if you or your family don't gather in your house, then you will be destroyed." This may sound minor to some, and many might look over it quickly, but please don't miss the significance of this picture. What was the color of the rope? It was scarlet red. Did you know that there is scarlet thread that runs all through the Bible? It's not in the binding of your Bible, and I'm not talking about red-lettered words in the gospels. This scarlet thread began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned against God. They realized their nakedness and were ashamed. God then killed a spotless lamb, shed its red blood, and clothed Adam and Eve with its skin. It was a graphic and vivid picture of the cost of their sin. When the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt God sent plagues to deliver them from Pharaoh's wicked rule. The final plague was that God sent the death angel throughout the land to take the life of the first-born male in every home. However, those who believed in God were commanded to sacrifice an innocent lamb. Then they were to take the red blood of that lamb and put it on the doorpost. When the death angel saw the scarlet red over that door, he passed over that house and spared them from the judgment of God. In Leviticus when God gave Moses instructions about how to offer sacrifices for the sin offering so that the sins of the people would be removed, He didn't say to bring the grain, the fruit, or the harvest. No, He instructed, "Bring your offering of animals from your flocks. Offer it, a male without defect, at the doorway of where I meet with you, that you may be accepted before God." In fact, God gave specific instructions about how to apply the blood.

Now we come to Rahab. The men said, "Rahab, if you want to be saved you must apply the scarlet thread to the window of your house." Please understand that Rahab's hope and salvation wasn't in a rope or a relic. Some hold to their rosary or even some outward practice, like communion or baptism, as the source of their salvation. The scarlet thread wasn't the source of her faith, but it was indeed the evidence of it. It would have been easy to say these words of faith and belief to the spies in a private setting. But, if her belief was real it would be evidenced by the outward action of placing this scarlet thread on the window. This scarlet thread was also a picture and reminder of God's means of salvation. This scarlet thread is woven all throughout the Old Testament and then leads us to the person of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness. People were coming from all over. John declared, "There is One coming after me that is greater than me. He existed before me. He is the Savior. He is the Christ." Then when Jesus came walking by one day, John shouted out, "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world." And how did Jesus pay the price for our sins? By showing us what the scarlet thread was pointing to all along. **Romans 5:8-9** says it simply, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His BLOOD, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." By the way, we can go ahead and read all the way to the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation and discover the key to our salvation, the key to our victory. Revelation 12:11 says that we overcome "by the BLOOD of the Lamb and the word of our testimony." There is a scarlet thread that runs throughout the entire

Bible. The question is whether or not it has been applied to the door of our hearts and lives. What about you this morning? Have you by faith believed in Christ – His death and resurrection – and confessed Jesus to be the Lord of your life? What concern do you have for your own salvation and the salvation of those in your life?

From this passage I think there are **three primary takeaways** that we don't need to miss:

- 1) God accepts all who come to Him by faith. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done or how you are remembered.
- 2) There is no acceptable excuse for rejecting Christ. She could have used every possible excuse in the book. "I didn't grow up in a Christian family. I don't know much about the Bible. I am too bad to be saved. What will my family think of me? Etc." Rahab made no excuses for her sin. She accepted her reality and her need for God's salvation.
- 3) God gives new life and salvation to all who come to Him by faith. Maybe you are wondering, "Well, whatever became of her?" Joshua 6 tells that when God gave Jericho to the Israelites Rahab and everyone gathered by faith with her in her house was saved and spared. They believed in the God of Israel, took an oath, and became part of the Israelites. They were adopted as part of God's people. They knew God, loved Him, and worshipped Him. But that isn't all. She eventually got married to a Jewish man named Salmon. Together they had at least one child they named Boaz. Boaz got married and had kids. He had a famous great-grandson they named David. You might have heard his name before. But, that wasn't all. If you read through Matthew chapter 1, eventually in the long line of ancestors we learn that it was through this very ancestry line that Jesus was born. Can you imagine the thought of a pagan harlot becoming a part of the ancestry line of Jesus? That's crazy! That's humanly impossible! True, but that's what faith in the living God of heaven can do. **1 John 5:4b-5** says it simply, "This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"