

THE FAITH OF RAHAB

"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." Hebrews 11:31.

Significant, startling and emphatic are the scriptural statements about Rahab, who takes her place among the worst of sinners and then as one of the outstanding marvels of grace. She is the only woman whose name appears among the illustrious heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

That God's marvelous grace and great love should ever bring about the salvation of a woman like Rahab is a source of amazement to the natural mind. That God should designate her as an example of faith is somewhat startling. The fact that He inscribed her name in that remarkable list of Hebrews eleven indicates that she was no ordinary person. It also proves that God does not see as man sees. God knoweth the heart, and He would not have allowed Rahab's name to be remembered through all the centuries as a heroine had she been unworthy of this honor. Her interesting biography presents clearly the glorious message of God's inexhaustible love and infinite mercy.

I. The Story.

The Israelites were steadily making their way toward Canaan. They were led in a wonderful way. A pillar of cloud overshadowed them by day and protected them from the scorching heat of the sun. At night a pillar of fire guided them. They were a people fed in a marvelous way, by the very hand of God. The manna which fell each night satisfied their hunger.

To Joshua fell the dangerous and difficult task of taking the Israelites across the Jordan River and conquering the land of Canaan. Standing on the top of the mountain and looking toward the land of Canaan, wise and cautious Joshua decided to select two spies and send them to inspect the land and bring him a report of their findings. These particular men were selected because of their character, their courage, their optimism, their faith in God and their devotion to Him. Calling them to him, Joshua pointed out the stronghold of Jericho, which was directly across the River, and told them he wanted them to explore the city and bring to him a report of its walls and gates, its state of preparation, the number of its inhabitants and the size of its army. It was a difficult and dangerous assignment, but that evening the two men set forth.

Rumors of God's wonderful dealings with the Israelites went flying from country to country, from tribe to tribe and from man to man until intense excitement prevailed and anxiety reigned everywhere in Canaan. They did not know how to meet this foe. They did not know what to do.

These spies crossed the Jordan and made their way, probably in the disguise of merchants, to Jericho, the key city, where they passed through its gates. Not because they were men of low morality but seeking to avoid attracting any special attention or creating suspicion, they asked for the house of a harlot, inasmuch as merchants frequently made such houses their stopping places, and they were directed to the house of Rahab. In spite of their disguise the presence of the two strangers in Jericho at once aroused suspicion especially in view of the common knowledge of the near approach of the Israelitish host. Those who watched where the two men went promptly reported their whereabouts to the king. The king immediately sent a detachment of soldiers to seize and kill the spies.

Rahab immediately discerned that these two men were different from others who had come to her house. They were perhaps the first who had not entered it for the purpose of indulging in sin. They spoke to her of the God of Israel and of the great destiny of the people of God. What they told her touched her deeply and she believed them.

Recognizing these spies as the servants of God and quickly suspecting the danger to which they were exposed, Rahab decided to protect them at the risk of her own life. She hid them on the flat roof of her house under the stalks of flax which she had put there to dry.

Soon the officers of the king arrived at her door to search her house. They said to her, "Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thy house: for they be come to search out all the country." With a serious look on her face and a sincerity of tone in her voice, she told them that two strange men, concerning whose affairs she had not inquired, had stopped there and had just been gone a very short time. She suggested that if pursuit were made immediately the men would be overtaken quickly. Completely beguiled by her obvious sincerity and the plausibility of her story, the officers rushed away to overtake the spies. Suspecting that they had taken the road back to the Jordan, the soldiers hurried off in that direction. Of course, it was a vain chase, for all the time the spies were hiding on the roof of Rahab's house.

As soon as the officers were out of hearing distance, Rahab, laughing to herself, hastened up to the roof and told the spies what had happened. She informed them that the people of Jericho were terror-stricken because of the marvelous miracles wrought by God for His people. There on the housetop in the silence of the night with the stars looking down upon the quiet, heathen city and the green mountains rising in the distance, Rahab made to the spies her great confession of faith. She told them that she was convinced that the God of Israel was the only true God. Her earnest words strengthened the faith of the Hebrew spies in their own God. She assured them of her faith in Him.

Like all noble souls Rahab was concerned for the welfare of others, especially those of her father's household. She was not satisfied to be saved alone. In return for her kindness to the spies she begged them to show kindness to her father's household and asked that they seal their promise with a sign and token. Fully appreciating the protection they had enjoyed in her house and the risk she had run for them, and recognizing the value of her service to them, the spies made a covenant with her. The men took solemn oath that they would see to it that if she followed their directions her life and the lives of all of the members of her family would be spared when Jericho fell into the hands of the Israelites. As a token of their covenant, she was to display a scarlet line or red rope in the window from which they were to escape, and all who were behind that line were to be spared.

Rahab took one of the red ropes which she had dyed and which she used in her business and tied it around the waist of one of the spies, brought him to the window and lowered him to the ground under the protecting darkness of the night. The rope was released by the first spy and drawn up again to the window by Rahab, who quickly tied it around the waist of the second spy and in like manner let him down over the wall to the ground safely. This was done in order that they would not have to pass out of the gate of the city and thus risk capture and death. She told them to flee to the mountains and hide for three days. Then

they would be able to retrace their steps across the Jordan and make their report to Joshua. The two men instructed Rahab to bind the red rope to the window, letting it hang down over the wall, and, when the city was attacked by Joshua's army, his soldiers, who were informed in advance, would spare her house when they saw the scarlet line hanging from the window.

Early the next morning, Rahab hurried through the streets to the home of her father and mother. It may have been that she had not crossed the threshold since she had established her sinful business. We can imagine the surprise of the father and mother when they saw the long--lost daughter return.

II. The Scarlet Line.

1. It was the means of escape for the two spies.

Rahab skillfully delivered them from their pursuers by means of the scarlet line when she let them down to safety from the window.

2. It was a symbol of Rahab's faith.

It was the symbol of her faith in the God of Israel and in His promise to give her land into the possession of the Israelites. Rahab did not believe that there was anything mystical about the scarlet line. She merely considered it a token of the covenant between the spies and herself, in which she cast herself upon their mercy by virtue of her belief in their God.

3. It was the means of deliverance for Rahab and her household.

Because she had been told to do so, Rahab fastened the scarlet line in the window through which the spies had escaped, and she left it there until the day that Jericho fell. Regardless of how much others may have laughed at it, Rahab did not remove it. When the Israelites invaded Jericho, Rahab's house was the only one left standing in all the city. Why was her house and all its occupants spared? It was because the scarlet line was displayed in the window. All who were behind it were delivered from death.

4. It was a type of the blood of Christ.

In this respect the scarlet line became profoundly significant. It was synonymous with deliverance and safety through the vicarious intervention of another. It was a type of Christ in His work of saving the sinner and preserving the believer.

His precious blood is the foundation of our faith, the basis of our confidence and the inspiration of our hope. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us for all sin" (I John 1:7). It provided peace from the past, grace for the present, and glory for the future.

III. The Sequel.

1. Rahab believed.

The terror of the Lord fell upon all the inhabitants, but only Rahab believed. She believed in God, who loved the Israelites

and refused to let them be overcome. That which distinguished her from all others was not a better disposition, a higher intelligence, or a more exemplary life, but it was her faith in God, which faith caused her to surrender completely to Him. Her confession of faith was very simple, but it was as clear as crystal.

2. Rahab was saved.

Because Rahab believed, she was saved from sin and from death, both physical and spiritual. To her, salvation meant a transformation from dishonor to honor, from weakness to strength, from shame to glory and from hell to heaven.

However, Rahab was not satisfied to enjoy her salvation and security alone. She was exceedingly anxious for others to be saved too. Immediately she thought of the home she had dishonored and the family upon whom she had brought reproach. Hastily she returned to the home she had foolishly deserted in order to walk the path of sin and shame. She rushed into the presence of her family, told her story and pleaded with them, one and all, to go with her to her house, thereby coming under the protection of the scarlet line. The desire to win and help others is always the first impulse of a saved soul.

3. Rahab was rewarded.

Not only was the life of Rahab and the lives of the members of her immediate family spared when the city was taken, but, when she believed on God, He lifted her out of the pit of sin, brought her into His family and made her a messenger of His grace and an ancestress of His blessed Son.

Rahab did not continue as a harlot after she was saved, for one who is saved does not continue in a life of sin, but she was united in marriage with Prince Salmon and became the mother of Boaz and the great-great-grandmother of David. Thus she was brought into the glorious maternal lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is truly wonderful what God's grace can do for us when we yield ourselves to Him. From what depths of sin and shame did sovereign grace deliver Rahab; and to what heights of honor and dignity did sovereign grace elevate her! Truly, the rewards of faith are most excellent and glorious.

There was no salvation for Rahab except by the display of the scarlet line in her window. Likewise, there is no salvation for any sinner apart from the shed blood of Christ. Therefore, let every unsaved person "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" and receive the gift of eternal life!