

Rahab: Woman of Faith in Action (James 2:25-26)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on October 4, 2009

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James 2:25-26 (NASB95) ²⁵ *In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

True faith that saves is a living loving trust in the Lord and what He has done for us in Christ, not what we can do for Him. To summarize the context (v. 14-26) we've been studying for 2 weeks now, this living faith produces living fruit which justifies one's claim to be living for the Lord and truly having life spiritually. It justifies that the faith he professes he truly possesses. Works justify in the sense of vindicating or demonstrating righteousness.

Exhibit A – Abraham (v. 21-24)

The root of his salvation (v. 23 "... *believed* God/LORD")

The fruit of his salvation (his "*works*," v. 21-22, 24)

Exhibit B – Rahab (v. 25)

"*In the same way*" indicates her justification was not another way than Abraham's (or ours by implication). She received righteousness when she trusted the LORD, and she in the same way, revealed that righteousness by works.

Rahab the harlot ... some have tried to water down the description of her in the OT to say she was just an innkeeper, but the Greek term *porne* is used here as well as the other epistle that mentions her name and it cannot be watered down. The Bible doesn't want us to minimize her past lifestyle, friends, it wants us to magnify God's grace that saved her from such a lifestyle by the same working faith! Both heroes of the Jews and harlots of Jericho are on the mantle of God's mercy as trophies of sovereign grace!

It's not just the people who are more respectable in the eyes of the world, because God is not a respecter of persons and neither are we to be, as James 2:1-9 has taught us. God delights to choose to save the lowly and less respectable in the eyes of the world (v. 5), and then demonstrate His righteousness in them before the world (v. 25). No one is beyond His grace.

James could have ended his argument with the "revered patriarch" Abraham, but he adds a 2nd illustration: the "redeemed prostitute."

- Abraham was a godly man; she was an ungodly woman
- He was the hero of Israel, she the "shady lady of Jericho"
- He was perhaps the most highly honored by others in OT times; harlots were among most dishonored in OT times
- He was a Hebrew of Hebrews; she a Gentile of Gentiles
- He was the one promised the land of Canaan by God, she was one of the pagans living in that very land of Canaan
- He received direct audible revelation from God; she only had indirect second-hand information about God

- He was called a friend of God (v. 23b; Isa. 41:8), she was among people who were enemies of God
 - He's a major Bible figure; she's a minor Bible figure
 - He's the father of the faith; she was totally outside the faith
 - He was a great leader; she was a common citizen.
 - He was at the top of the social-economic order; she was at the bottom of society.
- Opposites in so many ways.

There were all kinds of great *men* of faith that James could have chosen from the OT to put alongside "Father Abraham" in this verse, but in bringing in *the harlot Rahab* to close his argument on what saving faith looks like, he gives the spectrum of God's multi-faceted mercy which covers everything in-between. If you say "I could never have the faith of Abraham" ... Rahabs are saved, too. No one is beyond the grace of God.

It's not just super-saints like Abraham who the Lord condescends to call His friend. The Lord Jesus said to His motley crew of riff-raff fisherman followers in John 15:14: "*You are My friends if you do what I command you.*" But a couple caveats or cautions here:

- man never calls God "friend" or "buddy" (He's Lord)
- Yet Christ laid down His life for His friends and treats us as more than friends, as His blood brothers (blood-bought brethren) and joint heirs, sons and daughters of Father God!
- doing what Jesus commands does not put us into this amazing relationship, it's those who are in this relationship who do what He says because of love (not to earn His love)

Thomas Manton said: 'Some might object that not everyone could go as far as Abraham, the great pattern of all believers. But the least faith must produce works as well as the greatest, and so James gives Rahab as an example of the weakest faith.

a. As for her person, she was a woman, a prostitute, and a heathen when God worked on her. With so many disadvantages, it is to be presumed this was as low an example as could be given.

b. As for the act itself, it was accompanied by weakness, by a lie, which indeed is here suppressed, or at least not mentioned...'¹

Don't forget that in the very chapter in Genesis that Abraham is called by God's grace, *he* conspires to have his wife Sarah lie and say they're not married *to protect himself*. They later team up again to sin by him conceiving a child outside their marriage (Ishmael). James is clearly not saying that saving faith has perfect obedience (both Abraham and Rahab are presented with all their faults) but there's a pattern of life of real obedience with real faith that grows and shows its fruit to others. We're not saved by good works or being a good person -- Rahab had a very unsavory life when she was saved! But God rescues us *as we are* with our sinful baggage and background, and *doesn't leave us there*, He graciously changes us, giving a new direction and a new heart to obey, to the glory of what John Bunyan called 'grace abounding to the chief of sinners.'

'the [Abraham/Rahab] contrast is intended to alert us to the fact that a fully comprehensive statement is being made—as it were, covering the situation all the way from Abraham to Rahab and back again ... The life of faith is more than a private (long past) transaction of the heart with God. It is the life of active ... obedience which holds nothing back from God [Abraham], and the concern which holds nothing back from human need [Rahab].'²

Verse 25 says *she received the messengers*, i.e., she not only knew Israel's God is one (v. 19), she also showed the spies from Israel actions of hospitality and kindness when they were in great need. The same word *received* was used of another famous sinner in the NT named Zaccheus (a tax collector, the other lowest class of people to the Jews) who in repentant faith received / welcomed the Lord into his home. Rahab received these men as representatives of the Lord. She wasn't like the person in v. 16 who says, "*Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,*" and yet [did] *not give them what is necessary*" – she provided for them and protected them even at personal risk to herself, and then v. 25 says she *sent them out by another way* (i.e., kept them safe and then got them safely back).

Let's look at that story in Joshua 2 as well as redemptive-history. As you're turning to Joshua 2, let me remind you of what James didn't need to remind his Jewish readers.

- They all knew that in Genesis 9 there's a prophetic oracle from Noah about the LORD of Shem and blessing associated with his descendants (them the Jews), while Canaan and his descendants are put under a curse.
- In Gen 15 which James 2:23 quotes from, God reiterates His covenant promise to Abraham about his son Isaac and descendants to come and He promises the land of Canaan, but v. 16 says it won't be till several generations in the future, till "*the sin of the Amorite is complete.*"

The sin of Amorites and other Canaanites is now complete in Joshua 2 and God who had been long-suffering with these wicked pagan nations is now going to use Israel as an instrument of His just judgment to conquer them in conquest of the Promised Land.

Joshua 2 ¹ *Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land [i.e., promised land of Canaan], especially Jericho."* ² *So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.* ³ *It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land."* ⁴ *And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."* ⁵ *But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from."* ⁶ *"It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."* ⁷ *But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof.* ⁸ *So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.* ⁹ *Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you."* ¹⁰ *"For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed."* ¹¹ *"When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."* ¹² *"Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."*

¹⁴ So the men said to her, “Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.” ¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. ¹⁶ She said to them, “Go to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way.” ¹⁷ The men said to her, “We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, ¹⁸ unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down ...

²¹ She said, “According to your words, so be it.” So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

The fact that a pagan prostitute lied to the police should not grab our attention or surprise us. Pagans who have lived without God’s Law have life patterns of sin that don’t erase instantly (Abraham when he converted to true faith still acted somewhat like his pagan world for some time). The Bible records both the faith and faults of OT believers but we should never try and excuse our sin by theirs. But what is surprising and should get our attention is the *truth* she has come to know about God and that she acts upon as best she knows how and is willing to give her life for and commit her life to:

1. **The might of the LORD** (v. 10 “*we have heard*”; cf. Rom 10:17 “*faith comes by hearing...* ”)
2. **The majesty of the LORD** (v. 11) – His supremacy
*“When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, **He is God** in heaven above and on earth beneath.”*
3. **The mercy of the LORD** (v. 12-13). She pleads with these representatives of this LORD to be merciful and spare her from judgment on sin as her only hope, she asks for *hesed*

Jas 2:19 said even the demons believe and tremble, just like some people of Jericho believed God is one (the true God) and trembled in fear, but that doesn’t save them or others in Jericho or anyone who doesn’t take it a step further and fall before God’s majesty and plead for His mercy through His representative (today He is Jesus).

Dale Ralph Davis writes: ‘Genuine faith never rests content with being convinced of the reality of God but presses on to take refuge in God. Rahab not only must know the clear truth about God but also must escape the coming wrath of God. It isn’t just a matter of correct belief but of desperate need. Saving faith is always like this. It ... runs to take refuge under [God’s] wings. Amazingly, Rahab not only trembles before the terror of the Lord but also senses that there might be mercy in this fearful God. What but the touch of Yahweh’s hand could have created such faith in the heart of this pagan harlot?’³

Turn to Joshua 6:22. We could sing as our closing song “Joshua fought the battle of Jericho” ... except that he didn’t. God fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, and the walls came tumblin’ down. All Joshua and Israel did was trust and obey, marching around for 7 days (probably to much trash talk from the wall). 7x on 7th day.

Joshua 6 ²⁰ *So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city ...* ²² *Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into **the harlot’s** house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her.”* ²³ *So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel.* ²⁴ *They burned the city with fire, and all that was in it ...* ²⁵ *However, **Rahab the harlot and her father’s household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.***

Turn to the first page of the NT for the rest of the story. Her faith in action was honored greatly in Jewish writings; she converted to the faith of Israel and was considered the mother of all outside Israel who converted to their faith. They said she married into a line that produced more than one prophet.

Matthew 1 ¹ *The record of the genealogy of **Jesus the Messiah**, the son of David, **the son of Abraham**: ² *Abraham was the father of Isaac ...* ⁵ *Salmon was the father of Boaz **by Rahab** [she married a Jew], Boaz was the father of Obed **by Ruth**, and Obed the father of Jesse.* ⁶ *Jesse was the father of **David the king**. David was the father of Solomon **by Bathsheba** who had been the wife of Uriah.**

This book written to the Jews about their Messiah didn’t need to include in the genealogy of male descendants any mention of their wives, but it does so, again to magnify the extensive grace of God:

- A once immoral Canaanite is in the lineage (Rahab)
- A once idolatrous Moabite gal is next in the lineage (Ruth)
- A once adulterous David (her grandson) and Bathsheba, former wife of Uriah the Hittite (another non-Israelite)
- Several non-Jewish women, many sinful men, all imperfect sinners in the line of the perfect Jewish Messiah who saves all like them who repent and trust the Lord like Abraham did, there’s grace that is greater than all our sin if we repent

Not everyone rejoices in the Lord befriending sinners who repent. The self-righteous Pharisees scoffed at Jesus as friend of repentant sinners, tax collectors, and adulterous women.

Matthew 21 ²⁸ *“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’* ²⁹ *“And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it [KJV “repented,” others “changed his mind / heart”] and went.* ³⁰ *“The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go [like the guy in James 2:14 who “says ... but has no works”].* ³¹ *“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that **the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.*** ³² *“For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the **tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him**; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse [or “repent”] so as to believe him.*

Repentant prostitutes like Rahab in Matthew 1, and tax collectors like Matthew the author of this book, are turned by God's grace from their old life into a new life and are given eternal life, but religious people who say the right things but don't repent, aren't. Rahab proves no one is beyond the grace of God!

There's room around the throne in heaven for repentant harlots and homosexuals, tax collectors and terrorists, racist and rapist, even self-righteous religious hypocrites who repent! And there are people in the Bible in each of these categories who were saved!

1 Corinthians 6:11 says *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

Turn in closing to Hebrews 11. The whole chapter is really an exposition of the end of James 2, showing OT believer after OT believer who had turned from sin to trust and obey the Lord. It's rightly called "the hall of faith" or "the faith chapter" so it's a fitting place to end our studies on what true faith looks like.

⁸ **By faith Abraham**, when he was called, **obeyed** by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ **By faith he lived** ...

¹¹ **By faith even Sarah** herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life ...

¹⁷ **By faith Abraham**, when he was tested, **offered up Isaac**, and he who had received the promises was offering up **his only begotten son** [sound like another NT verse?]; ¹⁸ it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." ¹⁹ He considered that **God is able to raise people even from the dead**, from which he also received him back as a type.

...²⁹ **By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land**; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. ³⁰ **By faith the walls of Jericho fell down** after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ **By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient** [note her faith is contrasted with the others who disobeyed], after she had welcomed the spies in peace. ³² *And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,* ³³ *who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,* ³⁴ *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* ³⁵ *Women received back their dead by resurrection ...*

I shared this at Family Camp, but there's really only one hero in this chapter (or the whole Book for that matter) and He's a Hero with a capital "H." All sinners are saved only by His grace through faith, but even faith is not of ourselves but is part of the gift of God so none of us can boast. We can't even pat ourselves on the back for our faith, as the Lord is the author of our faith and its perfecter. From start to finish He is to be the focus, fix your eyes on the Lord

- The same Lord who creates out of nothing, calls Abraham, credits righteousness by grace, causes miracle babies to be born by elderly couples, and keeps all His elect till the end!
- We have the same red-sea-diving, wilderness-guiding, and manna-providing Lord of Israel that we can take refuge in!

- We can put our faith in the same sinful-harlot-saving, dead-raising, martyr-sustaining, and slingshot-giant-slaying Lord!!
- We can pray to the same Egyptian-army-drowning Redeemer, Jericho-wall-downing Deliverer, shepherd-boy-crowning King, our grace-abounding Savior and Lord!!
- He's the conqueror of the promised land, opener of barren wombs, closer of lion mouths, and cooler of fiery furnaces!!!

Do we believe He's the same yesterday, today, and forever, or does our lack of faith say He's not big enough to handle *our* problems? How can we not have faith in this Lord who is the same yesterday, today, and forever! How can we not want to trust and obey and love the Father who loved us so, giving His only begotten Son! What a mighty God we serve! What a wonderful Savior we have! How can we be so consumed with and focused on such lesser things instead of trusting in a God of such glory, grandeur, magnificence, greatness, faithfulness, goodness, providence, grace as our loving Lord Jesus! Beloved, fix your eyes on nothing else!

12 ¹ *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,* ² **fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** ³ *For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

¹Manton, T. (1995). *James*. Previously published in Nottingham, England in 1994. The Crossway classic commentaries (Jas 2:25). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

²Motyer, J. A. (1985). *The message of James : The tests of faith*. The Bible speaks today (115). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words*, Christian Focus Publishers, 2006, p. 27-28