

## **Harlot Heroine 11-3-02**

Over the last month we've been on the topic of coming into the Promised Land. We learned that we must be boundary crossers with the courage to go into new territory if we are to be Hebrews. We saw the need to not be discouraged, but to have a God honoring attitude of strength and courage. We heard the promise that God would be with us. We saw how the promise of victory is dependent on our meditation upon the Word of God. Last week I shared with you Buddy Owen's practical suggestions about how to approach the Word and prayer, like two parts of a conversation. Did you take your Sunday drive in the Word this week? If you didn't, renew your determination and ask God to help you carve that time out of your schedule. Make it your highest priority.

Today we are going to see what happened next in the book of Joshua.  
*Josh. 2:1 (NIV)* *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 named Rahab and stayed there.*

When they had come to the Jordan the first time, God told Moses to send out twelve spies. We don't have any record of God speaking to Joshua about sending in spies. It seems he acted on his own. God never rebuked him for it and it seemed to result in some positive things. When we know where God is leading there are times when we will not know all the details. We act in faith, trusting that if we are interfering with God's plan He will check our spirit or give us some kind of warning. Some people would go to the extreme of not doing anything. That is good when you don't have any direction. Wait for God. But once you are moving in the direction God wants, He leaves many of the details up to you. Have you ever heard the expression, "You can't steer a ship that isn't moving"? Joshua heard the promises and knew the direction. His ship was moving. He did a little steering just as we will have to do as we seek the will of God. Just check your motivation to see that your decisions are based on the directions God has already given.

Why did Joshua send just two? Joshua was one of only two who gave a positive report when the first group of 12 spies were sent in. It only takes a few when they are the right few. 'Secretly', because last time the people were waiting to hear what the 10 with bad report had to say. A work of God only takes a few when God is in it – if they have that God honoring attitude of Joshua chapter 1.

You might ask why they would go to the house of a harlot. The word harlot and innkeeper were interchangeable because they usually were one in the same. It was one place a traveler would be expected to go. It was a great place to gather information. Most importantly of all, it was God's plan, a God incident. It may shock you that God would guide these spies to a prostitute, but of all the people in Canaan that were destined to die by the sword, there was this one believer. God looks at the heart. Bible critics often complain about God's order to destroy the Canaanites, but they don't mention the extreme measures taken to save the life of one harlot. Though she was in a perverse culture and had a profession

that was evil, God saw a heart that was willing to believe. Of all the people in Canaan, God sent the spies to her. We need to ask God to help us see as He sees, to see spiritual hunger and past the current outward circumstances. Our prejudices and preferences have to be put aside if we are going to discern spiritual hunger in our midst. It didn't matter what this person's past was, what mattered was her heart's receptivity toward God.

*Josh. 2:2-6 (NIV) 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.)*

The counterintelligence agents of Jericho had spotted the spies going into Rahab's Inn. When they came to arrest the men, Rahab lied to save their lives. In doing so she risked her life. Notice she clears herself by saying she didn't know they were Israelites. If those soldiers had found the men hidden on the roof what would have happened to Rahab? Treason usually carries a death penalty. What in the world could make this Canaanite prostitute risk her life for a couple of strangers?

*Josh. 2:8-11 (NIV) 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 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. 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.*

She heard the testimonies second hand, but she believed them. A God who could deliver them from Egypt by parting an ocean, who could conquer their enemies, a God who was more than some little golden image on a shelf had to be God in heaven above and earth below. She said, "Jehovah your God is God!" She was so convinced that their God was the Almighty God that she risked her life on that fact. She believed that if she didn't act in that split-second to cover for the spies that she would soon die in the conquest of Jericho. That is faith! She even made it into the Hall of Faith for that act. Heb. 11:31 (NIV) *31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.* She got listed along side of such giant men of faith like Moses and Abraham!

If there is one lesson that should slap us along side the head it's this: Quit looking on the outward and look on the heart! God has such a clear way of pointing that out in this story. This lady is everything a Hebrew man would look down on. Jewish men used to pray, "Thank you God that I was not born as Gentile or as a

woman.” Not only is she a woman, who was a second-class citizen in that time, but also she was a Canaanite. These were the idol worshippers whose sins had come to the full. And to top it all off she was a prostitute. I’m fairly certain most of us would condemn her to eternal judgement, but God listed her in the Hall of Faith alongside Abraham and Moses.

I hope you saw Larry King interview with the Son of Sam. Son of Sam was a serial killer that is serving a life sentence in New York. Larry King wanted to get into the mind of a serial killer because of the sniper killings, but Son of Sam was a new creature in Christ Jesus. He was now Mr. Berkowitz who shares the gospel with fellow inmates and counsels the discouraged and troubled. The prison psychiatric staff doesn’t meet with him anymore because God delivered him from his demonic possession. Larry kept trying to get him to talk about who he was when he was killing, and Mr. Berkowitz could only talk about the wonder of God forgiving and using him for the Kingdom of God. The prison chaplain has Son of Sam help him share the gospel with some of the most hardened murderers. Who would have guessed? You can never be too bad for Jesus, only too good.

Incidentally, the truck driver who spotted the snipers sleeping in their car had recently been at a truck drivers’ prayer meeting in which they had prayed for this guy to be caught. It was reported that he said he thought God was going to use him to be the one to spot this guy. Incredible! Thousands of highly trained agents and God uses a praying truck driver.

These outcasts of society, like Berkowitz and the Harlot of Jericho, know how much they need God to live each day. The religious person relies on his or her own strength and ability instead of depending totally on the LORD. These dregs of society come to Christ and know right off that they can do nothing without Him. I love the story of Jesus and Simon the Pharisee. A prostitute was washing Jesus feet with her tears and Simon was thinking that if Jesus was a prophet he would know what kind of woman she was and not allow her to touch him. Jesus told Simon the story of a Master who forgave one servant a small debt and another a large debt. “Which one loved the master more?” Jesus asked. “The one who was forgiven the most”, Simon rightly answered. Think about it!

Every Canaanite heard the stories of the Israelites but only this prostitute seemed to be seeking the God who made the stories possible. God sent these spies to her house. Now if there is another lesson it is to expect God to send you where He is already working. Many of you learned this in the Experiencing God series. He was at work in Rahab’s heart before the spies were sent there. Here again we see the answer to those critical of the Bible. What about all the people who have never heard? How do you know they never heard? This harlot heard a testimony relayed by unbelievers and the Holy Spirit went to work on that. They were sent there not to convince her, but to give her a chance to declare her faith and be saved.

The friend I took to Promise Keepers went forward to receive Christ. Afterward he told me how the LORD had been preparing him for that moment for months in advance. He said that the evangelist wasn’t that eloquent or convincing, but the

Holy Spirit was working on his heart and brought him to that climactic moment of decision. Obviously the same thing was happening with Rahab. The moment of decision came when she opened the door to the soldiers of the king. She had to decide in that second who she trusted most, the army of Jericho, or the unseen LORD of Israel. Who or what is your trust in?

For some of us the decision was all too easy. It was not life threatening and so it seemed not to change our life drastically. Some of us put off the decision because we know there will have to be a change in our lives. We know God wants us to live differently for our sake and because we now represent Him. There was a young lady who heard an evangelist's message about surrendering her life completely to God. After the message she told him that she could not make that step because she was afraid God would send her to China as a missionary. The evangelist asked her what she would do if a little frozen bird pecked on her window and placed its trust in her to save it from the cold. Would she take it in her hand and crush it, or would she tenderly feed and care for it? The young lady instantly saw what he was saying and abandoned her life to God. Several years later he ran into her again. She told him, "You'll never guess what has happened! God has given me the opportunity to serve Him in China!" Her will had conformed to God's will, and now she went with great joy to what she had once dreaded. It takes faith to believe that the God you have not seen has your best interest at heart. Rahab took a giant leap of faith upon the God of Israel that she had never seen. Jesus pronounced a blessing on that kind of faith. He told Thomas that those who had believed without seeing were more blessed than he who had seen.

Want more evidence that her heart was changed? Read on.

Josh. 2:12-13 (NIV) *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."*

What happens when your heart is truly changed and you recognize the road you were on was leading to destruction? You want to save your family! She is so sure they will miraculously cross the Jordan River at flood stage and conquer their walled city that she pleads for the life of her family. This lady has faith! I wonder if her family treated her with some contempt because of her chosen occupation? We don't know, but we do know that she cared for them regardless and wanted them to be saved. Several times in Scripture we see whole households coming to salvation including Cornelius the centurion and the Philippian jailer. God cares about your family. When you are changed by Jesus you begin to care about them too.

Rahab and the spies make an agreement and a scarlet cord is hung in the window of her house on the wall. It reminds us of the blood of the Lamb on the doors during the night the angel of death passed over them. It is a picture of the blood of Jesus that saves us from the destruction of sin and the second death.

When the men got back to camp they were able to tell Joshua the news that would strengthen his courage. Josh. 2:24 (NIV) *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."* They relayed what Rahab had told them. The words of a harlot encourage this general to be strong and courageous, as the Lord had asked him to be. Her words were a confirmation that the Lord had gone before them and prepared the way.

Now listen to this! James 2:24-26 (NIV) *24 You see that a person is justified by what he does 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.*

She is a New Testament example of faith followed up with actions. If you believe like Rahab did, your life will change! I love God's style. He takes the person we'd be most likely to look down on and makes them an example for us to follow, all to the praise of His glorious grace. He does that just to show it's all Him, just to help us see how gracious He is. He is so good to us so often that without these demonstrations we would just assume we were pretty good stuff. He has to take an example like Rahab and Son of Sam and a praying truck driver to get us to see things as they really are.

Just to show you how impressed God was with her faith, you'll find her mentioned one more time in the New Testament. She is going to become one of the few women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

Rahab hadn't seen the display of love for us that we see when we look at the cross, yet she was convinced enough to risk her life on the God of Israel. Are you so convinced of God's power you would stand in faith with Jesus, counter to your culture, trusting in the Word of God? We try so hard to be acceptable with both worlds, but they can't both be right because they contradict one another. The day is coming when the walls of this world will fall. God is searching the world for hearts that are willing to respond to His Spirit. Is that the kind of heart He sees in you? What will you say when the world knocks at your door and you have to make a decision? Throw yourself upon the God of Israel who sent His only Son so that you could be right with Him, no matter what your past, no matter what others think of you. Knock, knock, knock! It's the world. What will your answer be? Where is your trusted placed?