

Scandalous Faith

Jonathan K. Dodson | Joshua 2 | January 24, 2018

We've been looking at God's call for Israel to move courageously forward into Canaan to obtain a promised land. The call has been issued, the leaders raised up, and the camp mobilized to move out, and then we hit this story. It seems superfluous. Sure spying out the land makes sense, but most of the story isn't about that; it's about a whole new character named Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute. Scandalous. Why is it here?

Our story **opens** with Israel's commander, Joshua, sending two spies from the hills of Shittim into enemy territory. They slink off to gather intelligence about the land and the city of Jericho in particular. Strikingly, they are unnamed and little information is recorded about the intelligence they gather. It's like there's a more important agenda. The camera cuts away to their location in Jericho, an imposing, fortified city. Inside the walls we meet two more characters. Total opposites on the social spectrum, the king of the city and a harlot. It turns out the king heard about the Hebrew spies, and apparently knows of their visit to Rahab. Now you might be asking, what were the spies doing in *her* house? Jewish sources outside the Scriptures maintain Rahab was also an innkeeper, which could account for their visit, but it would have also been a strategic place to hide, as her home would have been regularly visited by strange men. Regardless, the king is onto the spies and calls for Rahab to turn them over. What would you do? Turn them in and risk exposure? Lie and risk your life? Play the diplomat? Rahab admits the spies visited her but insists that they have already fled, sending the king's men on a wild goose chase. She lies and a lot of ink has been spilt on this. Is the Bible endorsing her lie? Is it allowable because this is wartime deceit, and a general never reveals his moves to his enemy? Well, in all the places Rahab shows up, in OT and NT, Scripture never *condones* her deceit, and it frequently extols truth-telling. So while debates about situational ethics have their place, to focus on those here misses the point. This isn't a story about Rahab's lie; it's about her truth. What is her truth? **Flashback** to a conversation she had with the spies before she hid them on her roof. She says, "[I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. 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 devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath](#)" (9-11). What's her truth? Is this a real confession of faith or a save-your-own-skin profession? Is her faith real? How can we know? Well, it certainly would have been easier to simply turn in the spies. After all, what kind of match are they for Jericho's king? Allow the state to engage in some counter-intelligence and get a leg up on Israel, then counterpunch? But Rahab seems genuinely moved by the reports of YHWH. In fact, looking back on her life the author of Hebrews commends Rahab for her faith, "[By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies](#)" (11:31). True faith. Always interpret Scripture with Scripture, *but what is faith?* Close your eyes and believe against the evidence? Maybe a crutch for when hard times hit and intellect come up fall short? Let's see what Rahab has to say: [I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us.](#)

Rahab *knows*; she's convinced of something. She doesn't say I think or there's a good chance the Lord has given the land. She says she *knows* the Lord has. Her faith **thinks**. She's *heard* the reports, *considered* them, and *weighed* the reputation of their God. Faith thinks; it's not a replacement for thinking. It considers the claims, weighs the evidence, investigates the story. If you're exploring Christianity, your questions are welcome here. You don't have to check your brain at the door. Real faith is thinking faith, questioning faith, and if you've been a Christian for a while and you haven't really wrestled with your faith, asked hard questions, then how strong can your faith be? Consider the objection that if God is real and good how can the world be so cruel and unjust? This week Rachel **Denhollander** stood up in court, after suffering abuse at the hands of Larry Nassar, and shared how she struggled with this very question. Is God cruel after all? But then she said she clung to a line from CSL who says that a man cannot call a line crooked unless he first has some idea of something straight. Where does that, the notion of straight, the idea of the good come from? It comes from God, and she appeals to him as drawer of the straight line, who visits wrath on the wicked and forgiveness to the repentant. She boldly stood up and said, "Larry, I can call what you did evil and wicked because it was. And I know it was evil and wicked because the straight line exists. The straight line is not measured based on your perception or anyone else's perception." Her faith thinks and so should ours. And she's an incredible woman to stand up call evil evil and good good. A hero. And our story also has a heroine, Rahab, whose faith thinks and **feels**. Her belief isn't a cold calculation of the data. There's something more going on. In response to the accounts of YHWH she says, "*our hearts melted*." The word means to liquefy, to become undone. When faith meets the Maker, it trembles. In all my years as a minister, this is a consistent theme when people come to faith in Jesus. They have a sense of their utter need and his amazing grace. Like Denhollander, they sense judgment and grace are real in God's presence, and their hearts quiver. This also what happens when a Christian experiences renewal of faith. They come face to face with the greatness and holiness of God, and their smallness and sinfulness and they cry out in acute confession of sin. They *feel* God. Faith thinks but faith also feels. What would our relationships be like without this, without affection? Lack depth. Faith feels love for God, gratitude for his gifts, and responds. It requites his love. Now, you might object by pointing out that she says all "our hearts melt", but notice her faith possesses a kind of awe over YHWH's power and might. She says, the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Her faith enables her to take in the greatness of God, sovereign above engaged below. It's a totalizing statement, a recognition of his utter sovereignty over every other little pagan god. In other words, it's not enough to just "have faith." It's where you put it that matters. Rahab is saying, along with rest of Scripture/Denhollander, *there is one true God*. Lord of heaven and earth. Faith thinks, faith feels; it stands in awe of the Lord of All. Are you? Are you in awe of the God who parts the waters, rescues slaves, and judges the wicked? The God who draws the straight line of justice, between good and evil, the God of utter glory? Do you have Rahab's awe or have you lost it? Maybe replaced it with awe over lesser things? Repent! Confess your misdirected faith, ask him to redirect/renew it, to melt your heart! You say, but don't other pagans say things like this about YHWH? Sometimes they do, but those with true faith **act**. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (Jas 2:24-25) Rahab was justified, put right with God, not merely because she closed her eyes and wished him to be

true, but because her faith worked. Her faith was so real, so true, it exceeded the boundaries of thinking and feeling; it acted. Faith **acts**. That's the whole point of Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith, is a rollcall of people who did something because they trusted in a great God. Does your faith act? If it does, then people will hear about your God. About how he saves, how he judges, how he rescues. They will see his character in how you treat those around you, how you care for our city. How do we know Rahab has faith? She puts her life on the line, welcomes the spies, and puts her hope in God. Is your faith acting? If we're to renew the city, if downtown is going to become a center of social, spiritual, and cultural renewal, we have to act! Tell others about the difference Jesus is making in our lives, show the difference in others lives. Rahab enters into a bargain with the spies, swearing on pain of death, to keep up her end. She thinks, not only of herself but of those around her...will you save my mother, father, brothers, sisters, all those who belong to them? Faith thinks, feels, *acts* for others because God has acted for us in Christ Jesus. Do you now see Rahab's truth? Her truth was God's truth, so God judged her faith not her lie. Have you failed to think, feel, and act appropriately toward God? Yes, every single one of us. But if we put our faith in Jesus, God judges us not for what we've done but for what Christ has done. His reputation becomes our reputation. You see, Rahab is written into the story of God because she embraces *his* truth. She marries into Israel and, the Gospel of Matthew tells us she becomes a great grandmother of Jesus (1:5)! A prostitute. God will work with, in, and through anyone. To any who cry out in faith, he will save; he will cleanse; he will forgive, and he will accept. Even a pagan woman with a bad reputation. His reputation became her reputation. We need this news. Our city needs this news. It is *the GOOD NEWS*, and it is not *our news*; it is *his* news, available to all, every ethnicity, every class, every gender, every single person. So let's give his news away. Let's demonstrate scandalous faith. **Flash forward**. Rahab lets the spies down on a scarlet cord, and they escape back home. She hangs this cord in her window so that when Israel comes for Jericho, Rahab and her family will be spared. It becomes a symbol of her faith in a great God, who rescues not only the spies but *her whole family*. The cord hangs there, expectantly, as a reminder of what obedient faith in a God of shockingly good promise looks like. What are you expecting of God this year? What are you attempting for our city that requires God to show up? What are you willing to pray for—a soul, a new city group, a center for city renewal, a renewed city socially, spiritually, and culturally? Why is this story here? The spies report back to Joshua saying, Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us (2:24). They return with no new intelligence, no master plan to take the city, but a simple confidence in what God has already promised—the land and triumph over the inhabitants. This story is here to *invigorate confident faith in a God who keeps his promises*. A side story becomes a central story because of the redemptive story of God. Let's be a people of obedient faith because we have a shockingly good God of promise.