

Rahab: Holy or Hypocrite - Hebrews 11:31

by Jon Courson

Rahab's story teaches us that faith is not just about hearing the Word, but also about risking our lives to serve God, and that the world's definition of hypocrisy is amiss.

Scripture: Joshua 2:9, Joshua 2:18, Jeremiah 15:19, John 4:16, Romans 10:17

Topics: "Faith And Works", "Christian Integrity"

Description

Jon Courson delves into Hebrews 11, known as God's Hall of Faith, highlighting the surprising inclusions and exclusions. He focuses on Rahab, the only woman in the Hall of Faith besides Sarah, as both an example and a problem for believers. Rahab's faith, demonstrated practically by risking her life to protect the spies, is a powerful illustration of true belief. However, her act of lying poses a challenge for believers, emphasizing the importance of maintaining God's standards amidst worldly accusations of hypocrisy.

Transcript

One of the most well-known chapters in the entire Bible, Hebrews 11 is known as God's Hall of Faith. I find this Hall of Faith amazing -- as much for who's not in it as who is. I mean, think who's missing: Elijah and Elisha, Jehoshaphat and Jeremiah. I would have thought they would have been shoo-ins!

But no, instead we find Sarah and Samson, Jacob and Jephthah . . . and Rahab. Interestingly, Rahab and Sarah -- the only two women in the 17-member Hall of Faith -- are both linked to Abraham. Sarah was his helpmate. But, according to James 2, Rahab was his soul mate, for she, like Abraham, had faith which showed itself not just theoretically, but practically. As we look at Rahab, I want you to see her in two ways: Both as a picture of the believer, and as a problem for the believer . . .

An Example of the Believer

After wandering in the wilderness for forty years, the children of Israel were ready to claim the Promised Land. Their first obstacle was Jericho -- a double-walled city which seemed unconquerable and impenetrable. So Joshua sent spies into Jericho, who ended up lodging in the house of a harlot named Rahab.

After hearing of the king's intent to capture them, Rahab hatched a plan to protect the spies. Why? 'I know the Lord, Yahweh, hath given you the land,' she said. 'We have heard what you did to the two kings of the Amorites. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt. For the Lord, your God, He is God in

heaven, and He is God in earth,' (Joshua 2:9-11).

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word (Romans 10:17). Thus, even though Rahab never saw the Red Sea part, never saw the Amorite kings get wiped out, she heard the Word, and she believed. Amazing, because way back in the book of Exodus, after the Red Sea parted miraculously, Moses was so thrilled he wrote this song:

'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestine. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them . . .' Exodus 15:11-16

And that's exactly what happened to Rahab. Not only did Rahab hear the Word about God, she believed in God, and risked her life to serve Him. That is why in the next scene, we see her hiding the spies among the flax on her roof.

Perhaps the mention of flax rings a bell, for it is also used in the classic Proverbs 31 description of the virtuous woman. Now if virtuous women worked with flax, what was Rahab doing with it on her roof? I suggest that after hearing about God, she who was previously a prostitute had given up her former occupation.

She heard about God; she believed in God; she risked her life for God; and she was changed by God. 'We'll take care of you and your family,' said the spies. 'Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.' 'According unto your words, so be it,' answered Rahab. (Joshua 2:18-21).

When at last Joshua led the people of Israel to march around Jericho and the walls came down, one part of the wall remained: the portion which held a scarlet thread -- the scarlet thread of redemption whereby Rahab's house was saved. Truly, Rahab is a beautiful example of the believer, for hers was a saving faith indeed -- not only for her, but for her family. But think with me about another aspect of Rahab -- for while she's a picture of faith, she also poses a problem . . .

A Problem for the Believer

Rahab presents a problem for the believer because instead of just trusting in the Lord by saying to the soldiers concerning the spies, 'Kill me if you wish, but my lips are sealed,' she said, 'They're not here. They went that-a-way.' She intentionally, purposefully told a whopper of a lie.

En route to Seattle this past weekend, I had an intriguing conversation with a well-known author. After interviewing a number of Christian leaders, he came to the conclusion that they're all hypocrites. 'Oh, no,' I thought. 'Not the age-old hypocrite argument again.' 'You know, it's interesting,' I said. 'Even though he's repented of wrong theology and foolish financial decisions, you'd call Jim Bakker a hypocrite -- yet you'd never say that of Hugh Hefner. Why? Because Mr. Hefner doesn't have any standards to violate.'

Gang, if anyone knows you're a believer, sooner or later they'll see you struggle in some area or fail at some point and call you a hypocrite. 'Watch me,' you need to say, 'and you'll see me fail. I'm not what I

should be, but I praise God I'm not what I used to be, and not what I would be if I had no standards whatsoever.' You see, the higher your standards, the more vulnerable you'll be to what the world calls hypocrisy.

The problem is, the world's definition of hypocrisy is totally amiss. Who did Jesus identify as hypocrites? Not Rahab, who, in spite of her newfound belief in God lied openly. Not Jim Bakker, whose excesses caused heartache and tragedy.

Jesus labeled only one group as hypocrites: Those determined to keep others from the Kingdom (Matthew 23). You don't fall into that category. Neither do I. Neither does Rahab.

What did God do with Rahab? 'Let the critic, the cynic, the skeptic point out her failings, shortcomings, and flaws,' He would say. 'But she is one of only seventeen I have chosen to be in My Hall of Faith.' That's the kind of God we serve. The world finds flaws. Our God finds faith. I know this because when He became a Man in Jesus Christ, He found another loose woman, called her 'gune' -- a term of respect -- and said, 'Go call your husband.' 'I don't have a husband,' she answered. He didn't call her a liar. He said, 'Thou hast spoken well. You don't have a husband. You've had five. And the one you're living with now is not your husband,' (John 4:16-18).

Only Jesus has the ability to extract the precious from the vile (Jeremiah 15:19). The world does just the opposite. The world sniffs out the vile in the precious. The world is quick to point to the failures, shortcomings, inconsistencies in the lives of believers. Why? Because the world is determined to keep people out of the Kingdom of God. Thus, by Jesus' definition, it is the world which is hypocritical, not the believer.

Please remember this, gang, next time the label of hypocrite is bandied about. It is not the breaking of one's standards which defines one as a hypocrite, but rather the breaking of God's heart by those whose goal is to keep people from Him. May we learn the lesson of Rahab. And may we all celebrate the grace and mercy of the One Who looks past our flaws to find our faith. In Jesus' Name.

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