

Josh 2  
Tim Anderson 18/10/20

Rahab is the hero of this story.

I mean there is a sense in which

God is the hero of every story in the Bible.

But as far as flawed fallible human heroes go,

Rahab is the hero of this story.

But as flawed heroes go,

Rahab would be by most accounts very flawed and very fallible.

Some people would be scandalised by the fact that she is a hero.

Rahab was a prostitute.

There has been an effort in Australia society in recent decades to destigmatise and even glamorise prostitution.

The whole 'prostitution is just another profession.

There are office workers and there are sex workers' line.

There is a vocal lobby pushing that line.

They are given very favourable treatment by the ABC.

The feminist lobby is conflicted.

Some of them think prostitution empowers women

because they can earn good money

and they should be able to do what they want to with their own bodies.

Others who are a bit more clued into reality understand

that prostitution demeans women.

In a society where feminists are railing against women being objectified, it locks women in to being sex objects.

Far from being empowering,

prostitutes are often enslaved by addictions.

And the addictions are their way

of trying to treat the mental health problems

caused by them being used and abused then discarded.

There is nothing glamorous about prostitution.

And then there is the effects on other women

that the feminists seem to ignore:

the wives and girlfriends of the men who use prostitutes

are obviously not empowered by the transaction.  
Were things any different in the ancient world?  
Well I doubt there was a vocal lobby group  
trying to legitimise the prostitution profession.  
But the social stigma, the mental health effects,  
the damage done to families, they would have been much the same.  
So Rahab is an unlikely hero.  
Even more unlikely because she is a Canaanite.  
The behaviour of the Canaanites was bad,  
that God described the land itself vomiting out its Canaanite inhabitants.  
In Lev 18:28, God warns the Israelites,  
"If you defile the land,  
it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you."  
God is sending in his people to dispossess the Canaanites.  
How can a Canaanite be the hero of the story?

And yet, despite her less than ideal credentials,  
Rahab is presented to us as a model of faith.  
How does she get to have a starring role in the story?  
Well Joshua sent some spies in to the land.  
You could have misgivings about his decision.  
It was after all the sending of spies into the land 40 years earlier,  
that had precipitated the Israelite's failure to take possession of the land.  
Why repeat the mistakes of an earlier generation?  
But in fact it wasn't the sending of spies that had been an issue.  
It was their report that lacked faith,  
and the nation listening to that report,  
that were the problem.  
And Joshua was not going to go down that path.  
40 years of wandering in the desert had taught Israel a lesson.  
So spies were sent.  
Now when strange young men approach a city like Jericho,  
how can they gain entrance?  
What house will welcome in young foreigners?  
You guessed it.

Prostitutes are very welcoming of young men.  
So the prostitute's house was a good way  
for the spies to gain entrance to the walled city.  
And no doubt the prostitute has a discrete entrance  
for customers who don't want the whole city to know.  
Perfect for a spy.

Well the king of Jericho gets to hear  
that some spies have gained entrance to his city  
through the local brothel.

But Rahab the prostitute,  
instead of showing loyalty to her king and country,  
shows loyalty to the foreigners who are hiding at her place.

Why would she do that?

Well that gets us to the heart of the matter.

It gets us to Rahab's faith.

This is why she is a hero despite her shady life.

Verses 9-13 are the heart of the chapter.

They give us Rahab's speech to the spies.

Basically her message is,

"I've protected you.

Now you need to protect me.

When you conquer this land,  
please spare me and my family."

It sounds just like someone looking for a deal to save their own skin,  
and to hell with the rest of their countrymen  
apart from their immediate family.

Hardly morally praiseworthy.

But listen to what she says,

2:9 "I know that the Lord has given you this land."

It's not I know that God has given you this land.

It's I know that Yahweh, the personal name of your god,  
has given you this land.

Her god's name was Baal or something.

But she says, "I know that Yahweh has given you this land."

Her god or gods don't even rate a mention.

In verse 11, "Yahweh your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

That is an amazing statement of faith.

Rahab lived in a world of local gods.

When you were in Canaan you worshiped the Baals, because Baal was the boss of Canaan.

But when you were in Egypt you worshiped Ra and Osiris because they were the boss of Egypt.

The natural thing for the Canaanite to feel when there is an Israelite army on the other side of the Jordan river is, "We're pretty safe.

That army can't cross the Jordan.

Even if they cross the river, they can't breach the walls of our city.

And anyway, our gods will protect us because this is their land.

But Rahab has seen past all that.

"Yahweh your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

Yahweh is not a local god.

He is boss of everything.

Heaven above and earth below.

No other local gods can hope to oppose Yahweh.

There's nothing to say

that Rahab didn't believe the gods of her own people existed, just that she had come to understand that Yahweh is supreme over all gods.

How did Rahab come to that remarkable conclusion?

Did she have a flash of revelation?

Was it revealed to her in a dream?

Did she just have a strong inner sense that it was true?

No her faith wasn't spooky or mysterious.

She looked at the evidence and made a rational conclusion.

Now you don't want to down play the work of God in that process.

As we know from our own friends,

getting people to look at the evidence and make a rational conclusion is oftentimes a miracle.

Particularly when you've been brought up to believe something quite opposite.

I know how many times I've explained to a friend all the evidence points to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. They have no argument against the evidence presented.

But that doesn't mean they decide to put their faith in Jesus.

A change in belief is truly a work of God.

But Rahab had that change of belief by examining the evidence.

2:10-11 "We have heard

how the Lord dried up the waters 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 devoted to the Lord."

Our translation says 'completely destroyed',

but the word is the word used for a burnt offering sacrificed on the altar.

Sihon and Og were made a sacrifice devoted to the Lord.

So Rahab assess two pieces of evidence.

The crossing of the Red Sea.

Are there any other gods around

who can dry up a sea so that 600K people can walk across on dry land?

Ah, No.

Was Yahweh restricted in his effectiveness

because he was on the territory of the Egyptian gods?

Ah, No.

The defeat of Sihon and Og.

Did the gods of the Amorites protect them from Yahweh's army?

Ah, No.

Did the fact that Og's bed was 14 foot long,

in other words, the man was a giant,

protect him from Yahweh's army?

Ah, No.

Is there any reason to believe

that a God who can get his people across the Red Sea  
can't get them across the Jordan River?

Ah, No.

Is there any reason to believe  
that a God who routed the armies of the Amorites  
will not do the same to the armies of Jericho?

Ah, No.

Rahab's assessment of the evidence is entirely rational.  
It is no less remarkable because it is rational.  
But it is rational nonetheless.

So Rahab came to understand that Yahweh the God of Israel  
is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

He is Lord of the whole earth.

Not just the land where the Israelites live.

He is Lord of all people, not just his chosen people.

And if he says he's giving the land of Canaan to his people,  
then that is what is going to happen.

But is that enough?

Is deciding that Israel's God is supreme enough to save you?

No it's not.

In the words of the letter from James,

Js 2:19 "You believe that there is one God.

Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder."

It's not enough to believe that Israel's God is supreme.

You have to act on that belief.

But here too Rahab showed her faith.

You see it's not enough to believe that Yahweh is supreme,  
you need to throw yourself on his mercy.

You have to stop trusting in other things  
and put your trust in him alone.

Well Rahab did that.

Josh 2:12 "Now then, please swear to me by Yahweh,  
that you will show kindness to my family,  
because I have shown faithfulness to you."

That is throwing yourself on the mercy of the Lord.  
She is not just reciting a creed.  
She is hitching her wagon to Israel's God.  
She had two ways that she could go.  
She could be a good Canaanite.  
She could betray the spies to her countrymen.  
Or she could risk being executed as a traitor to her country  
and instead rely on the God of Israel to protect her.  
And she took the second option.  
Notice that she wasn't just relying on integrity of the spies.  
She didn't say, "I can see you guys are men of honour.  
Give me your word that you will look after me and my family."  
No. She said, "Swear to me by Yahweh".  
Yes she was relying on the integrity of the spies,  
but she was very clearly attaching the promise the spies were making  
to their God.  
If you make a promise to me  
in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth  
then I believe that the Lord of heaven and earth will look after me.

Now there's something else in what she says that's really important.  
Unfortunately it doesn't come out well in translation.  
We don't have a great word for it in English.  
Joshua was originally written in Hebrew.  
If there are two Hebrew words you ought to know as a Christian,  
they are Shalom,  
which the Hoskin's homegroup looked at on Thursday night,  
and Hesed, which is the word translated here as kindness.  
Kindness is a bit of weak translation.  
This is the strongest word in Hebrew for covenant love.  
It's often used to describe God's unfailing covenant love for his people.  
When God appeared to Moses and proclaimed his name to Moses  
after Moses carved the stone tablets,  
he said, Ex 34:6 "Yahweh, Yahweh,  
the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,

abounding in love and faithfulness,  
 maintaining love to thousands,  
 and forgiving wickedness rebellion and sin."

It one of the great high points of the Old Testament.  
 And where the word is translated love, that's Heseed.

"Yahweh, Yahweh,  
 the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,  
 abounding in heseed and faithfulness,  
 maintaining heseed to thousands,  
 and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

It means the kind of love that sticks by you through thick and thin.  
 The kind of love that always keeps its promises.

That's the kind of love  
 that the spies are swearing to Rahab in the name of Yahweh.  
 And that's the faith of Rahab.

Heseed in the name of Yahweh is better than anything Jericho can offer.

She's had the men of Jericho around at her place.

She knows they are not faithful to their promises.

Certainly not to their wives

otherwise they wouldn't have been at her place.

She wants the heseed of someone who is faithful  
 and someone with the power to deliver.

Reading the story of Rahab

is a great way to understand the connection between faith and works.

James is giving his readers evidence that faith without works is dead.

And he says to them,

Js 2:25 "Was not even Rahab the prostitute

considered righteous for what she did

when she gave lodging to the spies

and sent them off in another direction."

What she did - it's works, right?

But it's not good works they way people often think of them.

It's not the 5 nice things I did this week

balance out the five nasty things I did

and so at the end of the week my ledger is even  
and God will accept me.

That's the gospel according to Santa Claus.

You've got to be nice not naughty.

Santa can't provide you with eternal salvation.

His gospel is a false gospel.

But this is a different type of good works all together.

This is the good works

that doesn't just talk about putting your faith in God,

it actively demonstrates commitment to the one true God.

It risks the wrath of the king of Jericho

in order to throw itself on the mercy and hesed of Yahweh.

Faith that is not put into practice is dead.

But the faith of Rahab is a shining example.

Her faith was put into action.

And was she declared righteous?

Well there is no scene where Rahab breaks down

and weeps about the ugliness of the sin of prostitution

and spies gently comfort her

and reassure her that Yahweh is a gracious and compassionate God,

maintaining hesed and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

That doesn't happen.

But she was declared righteous by the actions of Israel.

In a couple of chapters,

Israel invades Jericho and Rahab and her family were saved.

And they didn't just let her go free,

they took her in and made her part of the nation.

It's like how God treats us.

He doesn't only forgive us our sins,

he takes us in and makes us his children.

That is a declaration of righteousness.

She was saved.

Salvation came to her household.

She became an Israelite.

She became one of God's chosen people,  
without being born as one.  
As Romans puts it,  
she was of the faith of Abraham not the lineage of Abraham.  
And look, the Bible never says it,  
but if your moral concerns are still about her prostitution,  
I think you can be pretty sure that when she became an Israelite  
that she gave up her old profession.  
No one said to her 'Go then and sin no more.'  
But in Matthew's gospel,  
you will find her name in the genealogy of Jesus.  
And you probably need to settle down and get married  
in order to have your name in a genealogy.  
And that likely means you are not being a prostitute.  
Really there is no greater declaration of righteousness  
than being grafted into Jesus' family tree.  
There are only 4 women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.  
Mostly it's just men  
but women of outstanding faith are singled out.  
And Rahab is one of them.

How do we apply this story of Rahab in the church today?  
Well, who are the former prostitutes amongst us at Holy Trinity today?  
Please unmute yourselves now.  
Tell me about how the Lord Jesus has reached out and saved you.  
Are there no former prostitutes amongst us here this morning?  
Or maybe you are ashamed of your past.  
You don't want to tell us about where you have come from  
because you are scared that you will be judged  
because of the life you have left behind.  
It can't be so.  
We celebrate Rahab.  
We celebrate following a God who can save anyone.  
And the worse the situation he saves them from,  
they greater is his mercy and love.

And the greater is our celebration.  
 So please, don't be shy.  
 We couldn't possibly judge you, daughter of Rahab.  
 She is a hero of the faith and you are her daughter.  
 Unmute yourself.  
 Tell us about how God has worked a marvellous salvation in your life.  
 Or are there no former prostitutes amongst us here this morning?  
 How could that be?  
 Is it possible that the Lord of heaven above and the earth beneath  
 no longer saves prostitutes?  
 I don't think so.  
 I've met a former prostitute who became a Christian.  
 But could it be that a former prostitute might feel that she didn't fit in,  
 that she might be judged,  
 that the women of the church might be a little apprehensive  
 if she chatted with their husband after the service?  
 What about men who have used prostitutes?  
 I guarantee there are some of those logged on this morning.  
 Would you like to unmute yourself and tell us how God has saved you  
 from being a slave to the desires of the flesh  
 and made you a slave to the Spirit of holiness?  
 Or are you concerned  
 that the members of your church might look down on you?

Here's the application of the story of Rahab.  
 We need to be absolutely committed  
 to being a church that celebrates God's salvation.  
 We're not here to celebrate  
 people being nice enough that Santa brings them presents.  
 We are here to celebrate a God who tears people away from destruction.  
 A God who saves the hopeless cases.  
 And the more hopeless they were before he saved them,  
 the greater his love and mercy and the more we celebrate.  
 There can be no stigma amongst us  
 attached to God's great salvation.

And if there is.

If someone feels embarrassed to share what God has saved them from,  
then shame on us.

Because that would mean we celebrate middle class niceness  
instead of God's powerful salvation.

This is what we celebrate in the church.

"Yahweh, Yahweh,  
the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,  
abounding in love and faithfulness,  
maintaining love to thousands,  
and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."