

One of my favourite stories ever is 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang'. It really fired my imagination when I was a little boy. I guess most of us – if not all of us – have read it or seen it. It tells of a great inventor, he invents a car that can float and fly. Chitty (And right now you're all singing that song to yourselves – 'Chitty Bang Bang, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang'!) gets kidnapped – or rather car-napped by a mad king who hates children. Anyway the inventor goes to free Chitty, but at the same time frees all the children kept captive by the king. The inventor gets to marry a lovely lady, but more importantly the children all get to live in freedom with their families and everyone lives happily ever after.

And I think **every** great story goes this way, doesn't it, the goodies get saved **from** an awful situation but saved **to** freedom and lovely lives.

The Old Testament of the Bible tells of a great rescue of God's people Israel. You'll remember how God rescued his people from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt, he saved them from harsh and brutal captivity in Egypt. And we find this recorded in the book of Exodus, second book in the Bible.

But whenever there is a 'saving **from**', there has to be a 'saving **to**' – like the children in 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' saved **from** the mad king, but saved **to** freedom with their families.

In the **sixth** book of the Bible – Joshua – we are told about what God saved his people **to**: he saved them from captivity in Egypt, and he saved them to the promised land, land God had **promised** to his people many years before. The book of Joshua tells how they eventually enter and take possession of the land God promised to them. So this book is the second part to the greatest rescue in the Old Testament – what the people of Israel was saved **to**.

Let's read Joshua chapter 2, not just a **story**, but a historical event. Joshua and God's people are about to move into the promised land, but this chapter speaks about something that happened just **before** they did that. [Read]

This story has great significance, because it wasn't necessary to **include** this story in the account. Chapter **1** tells us of God's promise of the land and about his promise to be with them and give them strength to win the **battles** they'd face. It'd be logical to move straight into chapter **3**, which tells about Israel moving **into** the land, the promise of chapter **1** fulfilled in chapter **3**. Chapter 2 isn't **essential** to the story of Israel's progress into the land.

So, if it isn't **essential** – why is it **here**? Why not just miss it out, and get on with story? There must be great significance in the contents of chapter 2 – and I think there certainly **is**.

There are two things going on here in chapter 2; we've got the **spies** and their story, and we've got **Rahab** and **her** story. And I think the most **important** part of this account is what comes in the **middle** – like a hot-dog with the sausage in the middle, the most expensive and tastiest bit of the snack, while the bread **around** it is important but only to keep the tomato sauce from going all over your hands as you eat!

Let's look at the **spies' story** first before we move onto the **meat** of the story after that.

The purpose of the spies' story is to encourage Israel in trusting God's promises.

Those of you who know of the history of the people of God will know that as Joshua sends the spies into Jericho in verse 1, there is a sense of 'déjà vu' here. Forty years **before** this, they were in a similar position, about to enter the promised land. You can read about it in Numbers 13 and 14. **Moses** sent spies into the land. One of those spies was **Joshua**. He, along with Caleb, reported that the land was **good**, flowing with milk and honey, and God would give it to them as he promised. But the **other** spies talked about the giant people living there and spread **fear** among the Israelites. As a result, the people **rebelled**, they failed to take **possession** of the land and wandered around the desert for the next forty years.

Here we are again, then. **This** time, Joshua has succeeded Moses as leader, and he sends two spies into Jericho to help with preparations. What will the outcome be **this** time? Will Israel fail **again** – will they look at the difficulties? Or will they succeed, by looking to **God**? Tension mounts.

Commentators look at this in two ways:

- **Some** say that sending in spies shows Joshua's **skill** as leader of his people. Jericho is the first major city they've set out to conquer, and Joshua wants to be armed in every way for the battle ahead. He sends in spies so that he has the upper hand. The good leader, making the best preparations for conquest. Jericho is a heavily fortified city, and Joshua needs strategic information about it and its people.
- **Others** say that it was a sign of a lack of **faith**; the promise of God given to Joshua in chapter 1:3 - *'I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses'* - should have been **sufficient** for them to go in and take possession of the land. God **promised**, that **should** have been enough.

I think we have to be gracious to Joshua here – there is no negative comment here about what he does, **God** doesn't condemn him. And we all know what it's like. We read God's promises and we accept God's promises to be with us, to strengthen us, to prepare the way for us. But it's a different thing to feel **sure** that God's promises apply to us in **that** particular situation. Sometimes we just have to feel sure that God's promises are real for us, don't we? We need more than just knowing **about** God's promises.

It's like that for Joshua here. The purpose of the account of the spies going into Jericho is to give Joshua and God's people **encouragement** and **assurance** that, **yes**, God's promise is **real** and will be fulfilled here and now. And that's the effect of the spies' report in chapter 2:24, *'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."* ' Joshua and the people are **encouraged** to know that God will be **faithful** to his promise. What a **contrast** between **this** report and the one that happened 40 years earlier, they can be **sure** now of God's promise to give them the land.

We've read the story, we know what happens – the spies stay at the house of the prostitute Rahab, her house would have been a lodging house for travellers, built into the city wall, they wouldn't arouse suspicion staying there. But somehow they're **spotted** and the authorities seek them out. At this point Rahab **hides** them and has to tell a **lie** to deceive her own people so that the spies can escape.

Now, much has been made of Rahab's lie in verses 4 and 5. Commentators and preachers have spent time trying to explain her actions and methods. I'm not going to spend time looking into this, because **I** don't think that's the reason for this story being included in God's word. It's like taking someone into your garage to see your Rolls Royce, and all the person sees is the dilapidated state of your **garage** – his mind's focused on the wrong **thing**. I want us to focus on what the **New Testament** writers **commend** Rahab for. **This** must be the reason for her story to be included here, preserved for all generations.

In Hebrews 11:31, Rahab is one of only two women mentioned in the list of people of faith from Israel's past. We read, *'By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient,'* She's commended for her **faith**.

And James writes in his letter, *'... 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?'* James 2:25.

The writers don't pass judgement on her **past**, they don't comment on her **methods**, they **commend** her for her **faith**, and what she did **because** of her faith. Her profession and her methods are **recorded**, but not **recommended** – like King David's committing adultery and murder are recorded, but although he is a man after God's heart, his actions aren't recommended, they're **recorded**. David and Rahab are **commended** for their **faith**.

So I want us to concentrate on **Rahab's truth**, rather than her lie.

The purpose of Rahab's story is to tell us about faith in God.

You'll notice that just at the critical part of the spies' story - the spies are hidden, those looking for them have been sent away; but the gates are **locked**, how are they going to escape to safety? – just at **this** point, their story is **interrupted**, and only continues in verse **15**, which then leads on to their escape through the window. But here, right in the **middle** is what is very important here, and the reason for Rahab's story being told – the spies aren't **named**, they don't go down in history, Rahab **is** named, and she **does** go down in history. **Her** story is what's important. So let's look at what she has to say in verses 8 – 14. What has she come to know as truth?

Rahab talks about **God's power**. In verse 10 we read, '*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.*' She's heard of the powerful acts of God in bringing Israel out of Egypt. This rescue is talked about many times in the Old Testament, in the history books and in the Psalms, and **whenever** it's told, people recognise the power of God, and **fear** him and put their **trust** in him.

This is the **basis** of Rahab's faith – she's heard of the powerful acts of God. And this is the same today – Biblical faith is based on **knowledge** and **evidence** – to have faith we must have evidence of what God has done. We need to inform our **minds**, we need to find out what God has **done**, we need to read God's **word**. Faith isn't just a warm feeling about God and who he **is**, faith is brought **alive** by knowing what God's done to rescue us from sin and death.

Rahab heard what God had done in saving Israel from captivity and death; her faith is based on God's powerful acts. The warm feeling comes **later**, when we get to know and love God for what he's done for us.

Today, our faith grows out of hearing what God has done for us in sending Jesus to die for our sins and in power raising him from the dead **victorious** over death. Faith comes through hearing about God's **power**.

Each of us who has faith in this God has heard of his miraculous and powerful acts, and been **convicted** that he is God because of what we've heard he's done to save his people. We've heard. And this should urge us on to tell others of what God has done for us and for **them**. How are they going to hear if we don't tell them?

Rahab heard what God had done in rescuing his people in **power**.

She goes on to talk about **God's supremacy** in verse 11: *'When we heard of it, our hearts **sank** and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven and on the earth below.'* Here is a confession of God's supremacy that every **Israelite** would be proud of! Moses urged his people to acknowledge this some years **earlier**, recorded in Deuteronomy 4:39, he says, *'Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.'* This is what the people of **God** were to believe and proclaim – their God is the **only** God in heaven and on earth.

This is what Rahab recognises and acknowledges here. Israel's God is the **only** God. This is true faith. And she's not even an Israelite – she's a **pagan** – more than that, she's a **prostitute**. Yet she acknowledges that the God of Israel is Lord of lords, the only God. This is why she does what she **does**. She knows that God is supreme, he rules in heaven and on earth. Such faith from an outsider.

The supremacy of God. In our tolerant, pluralist, cosmopolitan society in this country, we **pride** ourselves as a nation in welcoming **anyone** from **any** background and **any** religion into our society. But we must not let this lead to compromising our faith, what we know to be **true**. We must **not** water down our message. We bring a message of **one God** and **one** way of salvation. There is no other. This is what the Bible tells us. God's word doesn't leave the door open for misinterpretation. The God of the Bible is **unique**. He is **supreme**. He **reigns**. He **saves** his people.

'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' God asks through the prophet Isaiah, *'The Lord is the everlasting God and Creator of the ends of the earth.'* [Isaiah 40:25, 28] There is **one** all-powerful and supreme God.

Paul says in the New Testament about Jesus, *'Salvation is found in **no-one else**, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'* [Acts 4:12]

If we believe in God, we **must** believe in his supremacy. **Rahab** did.

Rahab hears of the **power** of God; she acknowledges the **supremacy** of God; and thirdly she casts herself upon **God's mercy**.

The **devil** knows that God is powerful. The **devil** knows that there is only one God. But the devil does **not** cast himself upon God's mercy. This is the difference between **knowledge** and **faith**. Faith results in calling upon the mercy of God.

Rahab's heard of God's power, she's convinced that he is the one and only God, now she steps **out** and asks for God's **mercy**. Her fear of **God** is stronger than her fear of what the authorities might do to her. She calls upon the mercy of God in verses 12 – 13, *'Now then, please swear to me by the **Lord** that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to **you**.'* And she asks for her family to be **spared** when the Israelites attack.

And the spies give her their word, verse 14, *'Our lives for your lives! ... If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land.'* The spies mirror the merciful and gracious character of their **God** towards those who believe in him. God has **mercy** on those who've heard of what he's done, who recognise him as the only true God, and who cast themselves on **him** for salvation.

That's what Rahab does. This is evidence of a work of God in her life, this is evidence of her **God-given** faith. She's not satisfied with just knowledge **about** God, she needs to take refuge **in** God – to use a phrase from the Old Testament – she needs to know she's saved from the coming destruction, by casting herself on God's mercy.

This is evidence of a work of God in **our** lives too. Not satisfied with just knowing **about** God, and his nature and his activities. You can know these things but still say – as many do today – 'fine for **you**, but not for me thanks.' People need to see that what the Bible teaches about a coming day of judgement is **true**, a day when Jesus will come again to take his **own** to heaven, but to **judge** those who are **not** his and condemn them to eternity **without** him. People need to **see** that we have to be saved from the coming wrath of God – we need to cast ourselves on God's **mercy**, just like Rahab.

So **this** is the meat of this passage and the reason for its being included in the Bible for us to read, thousands of years later. The truth that Rahab reveals about true faith in God. But of course the story doesn't end **here**, we have to look at the outcome of Rahab's faith, to see the **wider significance of this story** to **Rahab**, to the people of Israel and after that to the **whole** of humanity.

Before being let down through a window in verse 15 so they could make their escape in verses 22 - 24, the spies tell Rahab what she needs to **do** so that **she** and her family can be **spared**. Her whole family will need to be gathered in her house when the Israelites attack. She is to tie a scarlet cord at her window, so that the army know to spare **everyone** in that house. Of course we can't fail to notice the similarities to the night when God saved his people from Egypt. The **Passover**. When God went through Egypt killing the firstborn, he '**passed over**' those who were gathered in houses where the doorframes were daubed with the blood of **sacrifices**. The scarlet cord reminds us of **this**, surely. God in his mercy will '**pass over**' Rahab's house.

And we need to turn to chapter 6:22 to find what **happened** to Rahab and her family: *'Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her in accordance with your oath to her." So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.'*

She and all her family were **saved** – **all who put their trust in God will be saved**. And just in case anybody's thinking 'perhaps she pretended to believe in their God just so that she and her family were spared,' look at the end of verse 25, where we read, *'and she lives among the Israelites to **this day**.'* She was welcomed into the community of God's people. **This** would suggest that her faith was **real**, she **did** believe in Israel's powerful, supreme and merciful God – she was saved **for ever**.

Amazing faith for someone like her, with her pagan background, with her dodgy past, leaving her **own** people and traditions and becoming a child of **God**.

This reminds us again, doesn't it, of the grace of God. Would we have thought this could happen to Rahab? Can a prostitute become a child of **God**? Can a **murderer** become a child of God? Can a **rapist** become a child of God? Can a **prisoner** become a child of God? The Bible tells us most emphatically '**Yes!**' No matter **what** a person has done, no matter what they are, once they recognise God's power and supremacy and cast themselves on his mercy to rescue them from whatever captivity they're **suffering** from, even **they** can become a child of God.

This is the wider significance of Rahab's story. The church isn't a club for the **good**, it's a refuge for **sinner**s. We can't say we only accept clean, respectable people in the church, we can't say the church is not for sinners. The church is for **all those** who've lost their way. Jesus came to seek and save the **lost**.

I don't know whether you've heard on the news that hospitals are pleading with people who're ill not to go to hospital – they're saying that people with a specific bug shouldn't go to the hospital until the symptoms stop. How **weird!** I know why they're saying it, so other people aren't **infected**, but it does sound really strange that hospitals are discouraging the sick from going there!

The church must **not** be like that. God in his grace welcomes **every** sinner who casts himself on his mercy. He says 'Let them come to **me**.' Rahab was welcomed into the family of God – her past didn't bother the writer of Joshua, it didn't bother Paul and James in the New Testament – it didn't bother **God**, he had **mercy** on her, he **spared** her, he **saved** her.

But there's **more**. There's one **other** mention of Rahab in the New Testament, in the first chapter of the first gospel, Matthew's gospel. She's included in the ancestry recorded there. This is the ancestry of **Jesus**, the Son of God. **Rahab** is an ancestress of Jesus. This is the **widest** significance of the story of Rahab. Because of the **faith** that she professed, she was **spared**, she was welcomed into the family of God, but most **importantly** for the whole history of **mankind**, she was part of the line which would eventually bring a Saviour for mankind.

Recognise the power of God. Acknowledge the supremacy of God. Call upon the mercy of God. Accept the grace of God.

Joshua 2 Listen to Rahab's truth

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Rahab talks about God's power

 God's supremacy

 God's mercy

All who put their trust in God will be saved, no matter what their background