

May 7, 2023

The Flawed Yet Faithful: part 4

“Rahab”

Hebrews 11:30-31

**Intro:**

If you have been following with me over the last few weeks, you will know that we have been working through a series on the hall of faith found in Hebrews chapter 11. I have titled the series “The Flawed Yet Faithful”, and in this series we have been looking at several of the people mentioned in Hebrews 11, both at their faithfulness and their flaws, and what that might mean for us as we journey in our faith with Jesus today. The big idea is that we can be faithful, even though we are still flawed. However, as the first message showed us, we can be flawed and not faithful.

This morning we are focusing in on the question of whether our flaws can be so many, or so deep, that there is no hope for us to be able to live faithful lives. Throughout the series I have repeatedly stated that our flaws do not determine our faith, or our faith is not determined by our flaws, but there may still be some who will think “Yeah, but the extent of my flaws are the exception to that rule.” Hopefully this morning we will be able to convince you that that is a lie, and that there is hope for you.

**Rahab:**

As the author of Hebrews gives his readers a guided tour of the “who’s who” of faithful people in Israel’s history, we arrive at someone who seems to not fit. This is a woman, and there are only two women mentioned in this list – Sarah, Abraham’s wife being the other. This person is not an Israelite by birth – odd in a list that is populated with Israelite historical heroes. And oh yeah, she is a career prostitute.

I am speaking about Rahab, and her time in the Hebrews 11 spotlight is found in verse 31, but the historical reference she is set in begins at verse 30. Let's take a read of those right now (in the New Living Translation).

30 It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.

31 It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Unlike the accounts of Abraham and Moses that come before this, the author doesn't really give much for us about Rahab – why is she there, what did she do, why is she counted as faithful, and so on. Well, she is counted as faithful because she was friendly to the Israelite spies...

Hang on a moment. Her claim to faithfulness is being friendly? We know a little bit more about Rahab, and friendliness would have been counted as a job requirement. Even if we don't measure that against her profession – remember Rahab was a prostitute – I know a lot of people who are friendly that I don't think could be accused of being faithful to God. What does this mean in Rahab's case?

To find the answers, or to at least get a slightly larger picture, we need to turn back in the Bible to Joshua chapter 2. She appears again in chapter 6, but the main part of her story is in Joshua 2.

The book of Joshua begins with Joshua taking on the mantle of leadership for the Israelite people as they move towards the promised land. What we find in Joshua 1 and 2 is not the first time the people have been to the borders of the promised land. At the first time, forty years earlier, Moses sent 12 spies into the land to bring back a report of how good it will be to live there. Instead, ten of those guys brought back a report of just how insignificant they would be in attempting to take the place over. Sure, there are lots of riches and food resources, but the

present inhabitants are like giants, and from a militaristic point of view, it would be impossible to take over that land. This kind of lack of faith is what preceded the famous 40 years of wandering in the desert wilderness. Now we come to the second time the Israelites are on the border of the promised land. They've already dealt with the nations on the east side of the river Jordan, and now Joshua turns his attention to the west. In his view is the fortified city of Jericho. Being a prudent leader, and to re-write the message from the history books, he sends two spies to check the place out. Their base of operation, or at least where they figured they could get easy lodging, was the home of a prostitute.

Why, given all the laws about purity and sexual behaviour, they go looking for a prostitute to stay with, the text doesn't tell us and it is not something I want to get into today. This is where they are. We have to deal with that.

The book of Hebrews, remember, states that she was friendly to the spies. But there is so much more than just her friendliness. Without really consulting them – perhaps they mentioned they were spying out the place for conquest—she hides them and lies in order to save their lives. She might not have known they were spies, but she would have known they were outsiders, and possibly would have known they were Israelites because their army was camped not all that far away and had just dealt with a couple of other major battles on the other side of the river Jordan. Regardless of when she discovered they were spies, that is what they were there for, and she was willing to risk the king's wrath by hiding and helping those Israelites. If she had been found out, she would have lost more than just her business. She would most likely have lost her life, and the lives of all her family as well, which is why they are also included in the request for protection when the army finally comes to the town walls.

So here we have these two possibly errant spies, and this one very errant prostitute. Her hiding place and lies work, and the spies are not discovered and are able to flee the city and return to Joshua armed with information vital to the war effort.

Where did they get that information? Since Rahab's house is the only place mentioned, and she is the only person they are recorded as having talked to, all of their intel must have come from her. And she does give them quite a bit of intel. It is her estimation of the feeling of her people about the army camped across the river that give the spies the courage to report that the land is theirs for the taking. It is her report, her understanding of what has transpired to these Israelite people, and how she perceives that her people are internalizing the information of what the Israelites have gone through, that changes how the Israelites view their chances of conquering this new land.

You will remember that the first time around, the negative report was because the people living in the land were big and scary. Now, it is the reputation of the Israelites that is big and scary. Word has gone before them about their efficiency in defeating kings Sihon and Og. Added to the recent news is the miraculous historical account of the Israelites' crossing of the red sea after leaving Egypt. Remember, that was over forty years ago. Rahab attributes all of this not to the might of the Israelite army, but to the might of their God.

Maybe it was not the Israelites who sought out a prostitute's house, but rather Rahab the prostitute who sought them out. Maybe because she had a home on the outer wall of the city, and perhaps because she was well connected to the rumours on the streets, she heard about these two foreigners and concluded that they were Israelite spies and went looking for them because she knew her city's doom was at hand.

### **Rahab's Confession:**

What Rahab did was more than just be friendly. What she said was more than just a military report on the morale of the people. What she did was confess a faith in God. If you read in Joshua 2:9-11, you will find that she regards God as more than just a god.

<sup>9</sup> "I know the Lord has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. <sup>10</sup> For we have heard

how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea[a] when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed. <sup>11</sup> No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below. (NLT)

She regards him as the supreme God – the one who is Lord over all of creation. The Canaanites had their own gods, but what Rahab has heard makes her reject those gods and turn in faith to Yahweh. And this was before the spies showed up. Her response of faithfulness was to be friendly to those spies, but really it was more than just friendliness. It was what they, what the Israelites, needed to undo the lack of faith found in the 10 spies from forty years ago.

And this earned her a place on the wall of fame. But even more, it earned her a place in the history of Israel. When Jericho was taken, she and her family were spared and lived out the rest of their lives among the Israelites. But even more than that, it afforded her a place in the lineage of Jesus.

Matthew 1:5 places her as the mother of Boaz, who marries another non-Israelite, Ruth. They have a son named Obed, who was the father of Jesse who was the father of David, of whose house the Messiah was to eventually come.

Lineage and history is of great importance to the Hebrew people. So being counted in the lineage of Jesus is a significant honor and is a reward for Rahab's faith.

### **Conclusion:**

Where does all this leave us? How does her faith in meeting with the spies, and being listed in the genealogy of Jesus and being given a spot on the wall of fame touch us today? Well, it comes back to the earlier question of whether my flaws, your flaws, can be too great for faithfulness to overcome. The short answer is no, they can not. Or more specifically, they can not overcome the grace of God.

Often, we can get caught in the trap of looking at our lives and thinking that our past is unredeemable, that we have done too many bad things for God to love us still, that a place in heaven is for others but not for us. Those are all lies that Satan tells us to get us to give up on faith before we even have a chance.

God has not given up on us. There is nothing that we can do, no sin in our lives, that can't be redeemed by God's grace and love through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. This is the great truth that so many people struggle with. God can and does forgive us – if we ask for it, but we are not able to forgive ourselves in that grace. This truth of God's grace, however, does not give us license to abuse the redemptive love of God. This is not permission to "sin all the more" because we think there will be the backstop of God's love to fall back on at some later date.

Rahab was a career sinner, a prostitute, and she was good at it – at least good enough to have her own house on the city wall. And she is counted as having great faith. Her encounter with God, through the reports of His action, transformed her life. Her confession of God led to an honest repentance and surrender to Him. His love transformed her. After Jericho fell, she gave up her life of prostitution, got married and raised a family that was part of Jesus' lineage.

Faith overcame her flaws. Faith can overcome your flaws and mine, if we allow ourselves to be honest in our repentance before God and acknowledge Him as supreme over all creation, and Lord in our lives.

Let's pray.