

Welcome everyone! My name is Dan, I'm one of the pastors here at the Creek, and I want you to know how grateful I am you are joining us today. Before we dive into our normal sermon, I want you to know that I scrapped the introduction I had planned because I think it is urgently necessary to talk about the crisis our country is in. After three months of quarantine, with over 100,000 people in our country losing their lives to COVID-19, we witnessed lethal violence against black men in our community, Ahmad Arbery and George Floyd - alongside, of course, several other inciting racial situations as well. We have now had over a week worth of protests in every major city in America. Most of them have been peaceful, but we have seen rioting, looting, and fires. Many people have been shot, several have lost their lives. This is such a uniquely challenging time for us as a country, and as followers of Christ, it is as important as ever that we respond to this cultural moment as God would call us to, led by the Spirit and loving like Jesus himself would if he were in our shoes.

I am friends with a black pastor who, on social media this week, asked his black friends how they are feeling right now, and he asked them to use just one word. Their responses: tired, depleted, overwhelmed, angry, checked-out, numb, exhausted, overwhelmed, drained, hopeless, despondent, anxious, somber, grieved, wrecked, weary, heartbroken, scared. And the hard thing is, this isn't the first time those feelings have been there. This is just a particularly intense expression of those feelings.

As Christians, I believe it is important to stand with the black community, to listen carefully to their experiences, to share in their pain, their grief, their heartache, their lament, and to do all we can to work to bring about justice and equality for all. This week we called our church to prayer every day at 3:17 - we met in the parking lots of each of our campuses, Monday through Friday at 3:17pm and prayed for God to do a redemptive work in our country, in our culture, in our city, and in our church. We must do more than just pray, but we begin by turning our eyes to Jesus and asking for his help and his guidance.

I want to speak a specific word to every person in our church who is listening right now who is black. I want you to know how much we value you, how much we honor you, how much we love you, and how grateful we are that you are a part of our church family. The Bible says that the church is like a body, and each member is like a part of that body. So to our black brothers and sisters in Christ, I want to make sure you know that you are an *invaluable* and *indispensable* part of our body. It is no secret that we are a predominantly white church in a predominantly white part of town, and I want to say thank you for being a part of The Creek. We love you and we are better because of you. God gave us the gift of different ethnicities, he gave us the gift of different races, and this is a great moment for the church to rise up and lead the way in showing the world what is possible in terms of a reconciling community marked by justice, equality, peace, and love. Let's live our lives in such a way that sets an example that our world desperately needs.

Let's pray together right now and ask God to move.

We are continuing in our series called Taking New Ground, and we are studying the book of Joshua together. Last week we listened to God's words to Joshua, who was the new leader of his people. God promised to use Joshua to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land. And we learned that in Hebrew, the name Joshua is pronounced *Jeshua*, which means "God saves." *Jeshua* is also the Hebrew pronunciation for the name Jesus. In Hebrew, Joshua and Jesus are the *exact same name*. Just as God raised up Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, God sent his Son, Jesus, to lead all of God's people into the promises he has for us. And last week we said that if we are going to press into God's promises and receive the inheritance he has for us, we should follow the same pattern God gave Joshua: we should prioritize God's presence, we should center our lives on his Word, and we should be filled with courage as we commit to taking new ground in our lives and through our lives for the glory of God.

Today we come to chapter two of Joshua, and we read the story of a woman named Rahab. Let me begin by setting the stage for just how prominent of a role Rahab is given throughout Scripture, so you can see how important she is. Hebrews chapter 11 is regularly referred to as "The Hall of Faith." One after the other, it mentions many of the most powerful, dynamic, faith-filled people throughout the entire bible. Only two women are mentioned in that chapter. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who is the father of faith. And Rahab. So Rahab is in nearly *unparalleled* company! In James chapter 2, when James is teaching us that true faith always results in real, tangible action in our lives, James uses two examples: Abraham, who was willing to give up the son he waited 100 years to have (that's some incredible faith), and then James also mentions Rahab, whose faith compelled her to both *risk* her life and then radically *transform* her life in order to become a part of the people of God.

And Rahab is also mentioned in Matthew 1. Matthew 1 contains the genealogy of Jesus - there are 42 generations of ancestors listed. Of those 42 ancestors, only 3 women are specifically mentioned by name. And as you've probably guessed, Rahab is one of them. God brought her not only into his spiritual family, but into the physical lineage of Jesus Christ, the savior of the world.

So: Rahab is listed alongside Sarah, she is mentioned as an example of faith next to Abraham, and she is part of the family tree of Jesus himself. All of which is incredible. And here's the thing - if you knew about the *first* part of her life, if you knew the decisions she had made, you would have never been able to guess that! It would have been the furthest thing from your mind in terms of the trajectory of her life.

Now, maybe you are asking why. I mean, what made Rahab such an unlikely candidate to be used by God and set up as an example for others to follow? Well, to begin with, she was not Jewish, she was a Canaanite - she was not a part of the Israelite people. And as a Canaanite, not only was she an outsider, but she was a part of a culture that was, morally and religiously speaking, very opposed to the truth of God. They practiced polytheism, they worshipped tribal deities, they even offered their children as sacrifices to their gods. The Canaanites were notoriously wicked, inhumane, and unjust in their practices.

So she wasn't a part of the Israelite people, she worshipped other gods, she was engaged in a very corrupt culture, and in addition to all that, the bible tells us she was a prostitute. I won't go

into all the details, as I know we have young people watching at home, but I think you can see why she wasn't voted "most likely to be used by God" in her high school class. And here's why I love that so much: Rahab's life tells us that God chooses some of the least likely people to do some of his greatest work. Let me say that again: *God chooses some of the least likely people to do some of his greatest work.* We see that in the story we are getting ready to study together, and we also see it in our lives today.

If you have your bibles, turn with me to Joshua 2. I've asked my friend Lise to read this passage for us, as she has a much better reading voice than I do. As Lise reads, following along.

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, "I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 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. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

"Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them - and that you will save us from death."

"Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land."

So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. She said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

Now the men had said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.”

“Agreed,” she replied. “Let it be as you say.”

So she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. 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.”

Thank you for reading that for us, Lise! Let’s take a deeper look at that story she read. This passage begins with two spies going to investigate the Promised Land. They are going to try to devise a strategy to take the ground. And they sought shelter in the city of Jericho with our heroine, Rahab. And as we read, she protected them by both hiding them and sending the men from town off in a different direction. After the coast is clear, she tells them why she did it. 2:9 tells us:

She said to them, “I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 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. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

Several things stand out to me from what she told them: first, she has heard about God and even knows his personal name - four different times she refers to God as Yahweh. That’s significant. Second, she knows what God has done; she has heard of his mighty acts of power and how he worked to save his people - parting the red sea, pushing back their enemies. So, she knows who God is, and she knows what God has done. And third, she has come to believe that this personal, powerful God is actually the one, true God who rules over the world. She said in verse 11: “For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” In a day in age when people worshipped lots of gods, and she grew up offering sacrifices to Molech, Baal, Asherah, and Chemosh – saying, “your God, Yahweh, is God in heaven above and on the earth below,” is her way of saying, “I used to give allegiance to these other deities, I used to live my life serving

them (which was really a roundabout way of serving myself), but now I know the truth. Yahweh is the one true God. And I want to draw a line in the sand and say that from this day forward, I want to live my life for him.”

That’s a courageous decision. And it’s also a logical decision. Rahab saw what was happening to the people all around them, she saw that God was bringing justice and judgment on the people around her for generation after generation of sinful, selfish decisions. And Rahab knew that she and her people were next. She said in verse 11, “Our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed.” She knew in that moment, she and her family were standing right in the cross-hairs of God’s righteous judgment because of this sin. But Rahab, instead of standing her ground, instead of insisting she had no sin, instead of making excuses, instead of trying to be better by her own effort, she fell on the grace of God. She was willing to walk away from her old way of life, walk away from her old religious commitments, walk away from her city, walk away from her culture, and ask God to give her an entirely new life. She called out to God for salvation. And God heard her cry.

She said to these Israelite spies, “I risked everything to help you and keep you safe. Will you now, as representatives of the one true God, the God who fills the heavens above and the earth below, extend compassion to help me?” And, of course, they said, “yes, our lives for yours.” They told her, “when God’s judgment comes on your city, place this scarlet cord in your window, this is the sign that you will be safe, that God’s judgment will not fall on you, but that you and your household will be saved.”

And I love the rich, symbolic meaning of the red rope. The scarlet chord points both backward and forward at the same time. It points backward to the exodus. Do you remember when the Israelites were in Egypt, when there had already been nine plagues, but Pharaoh was unrelenting, so God said he would send one more plague, a plague on all the firstborn sons in the land? And then on that fateful night, the angel of death passed through the land, but the Israelites took the blood of a lamb and placed it over their door frames. That red blood meant that when God’s judgment came on the land, their sons would be saved. Now Rahab is told, not to put blood on her doorpost, but rather to put a crimson cord in her window. That scarlet thread was a sign that she and her family belong to God, so that when judgment came, their lives would be spared, just like the Passover.

So, the scarlet chord points backward to the Passover lamb, but it also points forward to the *ultimate* Passover lamb - it points to Christ himself. Think of Jesus, hanging on the cross, his body beaten, his brow pierced with thorns, his hands and feet with nails in them, and a spear in his side. Blood everywhere. Ephesians 1:7 says that our redemption came *through his blood*. Revelation 1:5 says that Jesus freed us from our sins *by his blood*. Hebrews tells us that without the *shedding of blood* there is no forgiveness. That red thread marked Rahab out for mercy and salvation, and it was a signpost, pointing to Jesus, who one day, from a crimson cross, would bring mercy and salvation to all who place their faith in him!

This is where I believe the story of Rahab is so overwhelmingly relevant for us today. Maybe, like Rahab, we find ourselves face to face with the reality that we’ve lived our lives for ourselves, that we’ve followed our culture and the way of the world. And we are coming to the

conviction that that's not the way to live, we are realizing there is a living God, a God who fills the heavens and the earth, that if we continue to live life our own way, we will come under his judgment. But if we reach out for that scarlet cord, if we cling to the lifeline that is the cross of Jesus Christ and place our faith in him, we will be saved. Jesus takes the judgment we deserve and brings us into the family of God.

Rahab found salvation by placing her faith in the living God, *and so can you*. It doesn't matter how you've lived your life before today, it doesn't matter what cultural values you may have embraced, it doesn't matter what small mistakes you've made in the past, it doesn't matter what enormous mistakes you've made in the past. Think about Rahab - it doesn't matter if your *entire* way of life was contrary to the way of God! If today you look to Jesus and say, "I know there is one, true, living God, he is the God who fills the heavens and the earth, and I want to turn away from living for myself, turn away from living like everyone else around me, and I want to live for him" - then friends, just as salvation came to Rahab, salvation will come to you.

Sometimes we tend to think that mistakes in our past disqualify us from the grace of God. Just the opposite. Nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus himself said he came to seek and save the lost. Jesus said the doctor doesn't show up to help the healthy, but the sick. Jesus spent so much time around people of notorious ill repute that they called him "friend of sinners." And I'm telling you, Jesus wants to be called your friend. He wants to be called my friend. We have all sinned. Our sin, like Rahab, has us standing right in the crosshairs of God's judgment. But if we place our faith in Jesus, and if we put that faith into action, we will be saved. Even if you think you are the least likely person!

And I could be wrong, but I think that's why, in God's providence, those two spies were sent into Jericho in the first place. They thought they were being sent on a reconnaissance mission to bring back intel about the city. I think at a much deeper level, God sent those two spies on a rescue mission to bring Rahab *out* of the city. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says "The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." God knew Rahab was in that city and he knew the condition of her heart, so he sent people in there to rescue her and bring her out.

Friends, *that's who our God is!* God is continually and constantly searching for anyone and everyone whose heart is open to him, doing whatever it takes to bring them to salvation. Maybe right now, God is searching for you. Like the shepherd who leaves the 99, God is willing to pay any price, go to any lengths, to bring you into his family. All you have to do is receive the love of God into your heart, cling to the cross of Christ, and be saved.

Many of you may not know this, but almost every Sunday our church is blessed and fortunate enough to have a good number of women who are in the adult entertainment industry join us for services. Every weekend there are people who work in local clubs who come to church, engage with the worship, listen to the teaching, and open their lives up to God. And I'd like to take just a moment and speak a word to any of those ladies who might be joining us online today. If that is you: I want you to know that as a church, we love you. We are so honored that you would join us on Sundays, and it means the world to us that you feel like our church is a safe enough place for

you to come to receive and engage, to study and to heal. Our doors, our arms, and our hearts will always, *always* be open to you. And I want you to know that our doors, our arms, and our hearts will always be open to you because *God's* door, *God's* arms, *God's* heart are always open to you. Just like God invited Rahab to walk away from her former life and into his family, God is always there, extending the invitation through his gospel for you to turn to him and be saved.

There are a few women who I know well, people I have very close relationships with, who spent some time in the same line of work as Rahab. For a long time they felt like they were too far gone. Like they had made too many mistakes. Like God would never take them back. I remember specific conversations filled with so many tears. I understand the sentiment: "I can't forgive myself. How could God ever forgive me?" But can I tell you something? God's ability to forgive is *greater* than yours. The Bible tells us in 1 John 3 that even if our consciences condemn us, God is greater than our consciences. God saved a prostitute like Rahab, a tax collector like Zacchaeus, the thief on the cross, even a murderer like Paul. There is no one beyond the grace of God. *No one beyond the grace of God.* And today, if you have faith, salvation can come to you, too.

Faith is not just a feeling in our hearts. Think about Rahab. Her faith wasn't just a prayer she prayed, a thought in her mind or a sensation in her gut - her faith moved her to action. She risked everything to help out the spies. And it's not what she believed that she is remembered for, it was what she *did* because of what she believed that she is remembered for. Listen to James 2:25, "In the same way, 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?"

Her faith was put into practice, and that's what God is inviting us to do with our faith today. Maybe for you, today is the day you turn to God, you repent of your former way of life, you look to the cross, and like a crimson lifeline, you cling to Jesus for salvation. Faith put into practice means that it's more than just a change of your mind, it's more than just a prayer where you invite Jesus into your life, it means you turn your life around, you begin living for God, you are grafted into his family, you are baptized, you receive the Holy Spirit, and you commit that from this point forward, every breath you breathe you breathe for him, every step you take you take for him, every word you speak you speak for him. Your life is now in God's hands. If right now, you are making that decision in your heart, please reach out to us and let us know that. Send us an email at contact@thecreek.org, and we will be in touch with you about the next steps you can take.

Others of you have made that decision in the past, and you have had saving faith for a long time now. But you are convicted that it's time to put that faith into practice. It's time for that faith to actually result in a change of allegiance, a change of community, a change of lifestyle. Rahab was remembered not just for her faith, but what her faith compelled her to do. So can I ask you, if you have faith, how is your life different because of your faith? Who are the people far from God you are loving, who are the lonely people you are spending time with, the impoverished people you are supporting, those who are younger in their faith you are discipling? In a moment like this, how are you leveraging your resources for racial reconciliation and justice? At the end of the day, when we stand before Jesus, he's not just going to ask us what we believed, he is going to ask us how we lived and what we did because of what we believed. And my heart as a

pastor is that every single person who calls this their church home, when Jesus asks them what they did with their faith in him, are able to give a real response, and then hear Jesus himself say: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” It’s faith that saves, and saving faith always leads to a lifestyle of love and sacrifice that brings glory to God.

I would ask you to take whatever elements you have prepared for communion. And as you take this time to engage with Christ and thank him for his sacrifice, give special attention to the rescue mission Jesus went on to bring you out of certain destruction, into the family of God. Thank him for shedding his blood, the scarlet cord of our salvation. And ask him to lead you into a life of faith that is so commendable, it is talked about for generations to come as an example for others to follow.