

### Why would God show mercy on me?

<sup>8</sup> Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof <sup>9</sup> and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given this land to you 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. <sup>12</sup> 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 <sup>13</sup> 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.”

<sup>14</sup> “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.”

<sup>15</sup> So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall.

<sup>16</sup> Now she had 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.”

<sup>17</sup> The men said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. <sup>20</sup> But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.”

<sup>21</sup> “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 I first read the story this week, I questioned: Why would two God-fearing young men enter the house of a prostitute? We have to understand why they were in Jericho in the first place. The LORD directed Commander Joshua, successor to Moses, to cross west over the Jordan River and take possession of the land of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as inheritance for their descendents. An experienced soldier in warfare, Joshua secretly sent two trusted men to go undercover into the city of Jericho, the first city the Israelite army would encounter. The LORD had not yet revealed to Joshua what he will do with the walls of the city. And people of faith do not presume miracles. They are bold as they ride the waves of the LORD’s promises. Joshua confidently sent two spies into Jericho.

Then we read that these two spies enter the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Again, I ask why? Well, I came up with a list of possible reasons. First of all, a good spy knows how to blend into a crowd. Young male travelers would not stand out at a prostitute’s home. Secondly, a public house of ill-repute may give them the best information about Jericho. Thirdly, a lady of the night may not have a moral obligation to hand over spies to the king. Fourthly, her house was built on the city wall, a quick escape. Perhaps the most obvious answer: the LORD led them there.

The story continues like a suspense thriller movie. Their cover is blown. The king is privy to their purpose. He even knows their exact location. He sends messengers to Rahab’s home, no doubt armed with swords. As the guards knock on the door demanding to be let in, showing their search warrant, Rahab quickly shoos the spies up the stairs. The spies had hoped to carry out their reconnaissance mission, leave the city undetected and report back to Joshua. Now their plans are shattered.

Rahab hides the two men on the flat roof top, under stalks of flax, (used for making linen, lamp wicks and rope). They lie as still as possible, if one of them sneezes or coughs, it’s all over, for just a few feet out of

reach the king's men are searching the premises. Rahab interrupts the search, "Get out of my house! They aren't here anymore!" She disobeys the king's order and lies to his messengers. She would rather protect innocent life today than ruin lives as she no doubt did in the past. Instead she sends the king's servants on a wild goose chase. When Rahab feels it is safe she lets the men know they are out of harm's way. Then she shares the intel they had sought in their mission, and after hearing it, I'm sure they were very eager to return to camp and report back to Commander Joshua.

**"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."** <sup>11</sup> **When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."** How did Rahab and the people of Jericho hear about the exodus from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea? Those events happened 40 years prior. You have to remember that there was no text messaging, no email, no FOX News. This was a day of oral transmission, story tellers. Traders or merchants traveling through Egypt to Canaan may have shared the news. And it was big news, "A group of 2million plus is heading to your home turf and they intend to make it their own. And look who they have supporting them; their God. What happened to the Red Sea was no freak happenstance of nature. That was divine intervention, people!" And when the Israelites tried to pass through the nations east of the Jordan, two powerhouse kings, Sihon and Og, marched out with their armies to oppose the advancing Israelites. The battle report came back; no survivors. No wonder the hearts of the people of Jericho melted like candle wax. No wonder the spirit of courage fled men's hearts. They did not want to be the next city to be exterminated by a people who had the Creator of heaven and earth on their side. No wonder the gates of the city immediately slammed shut when the pursuers ran out to capture the spies. The citizens of Jericho couldn't help but speculate as they peered over the city walls, "Are the Israelites hiding in the hills over there?"

Rahab shares the fears of the people of Jericho. She opens her own heart, and we have to ask, "Is this a confession of saving faith? **"I know that the LORD has given this land to you 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."** This is what I have become convinced of based on the facts shared with me: Your God is the One, True God. I know his name is the LORD, Yahweh, the God of mercy and compassion; the God who always keeps his promises. He made a promise to send a Messiah. He also promised to give this land as an inheritance to his people and he will most certainly do it.

How did Rahab's trust in the living LORD begin to grow? We know that faith is always a gift from God and that he works faith through his Word. The author is silent on the subject. We don't know who witnessed to Rahab. We can speculate that attached to the report of a messenger was the Word of the LORD's promise. The two spies could have been the first to share God's saving promises. What we do know is what the LORD did to the heart of this prostitute after she heard about **"the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."** (Ex 34:6) She abandoned the gods of Canaan for the one true God.

Next we listen in on the negotiations between the two parties. Rahab and the two spies want confirmation that the other will do as promised. In Chapter 6:25 amid the holocaust that engulfs the city of Jericho we read, **"But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her."**

Why did God show mercy on a prostitute? Why would he spare a woman who once sold her body for money, who once believed in many gods and believed that these gods wanted sex to be part of the worship service? Why should God have mercy on me? Even though I know that my sinful nature has been drowned in the waters of my baptism, at times in my walk of faith I still act like Rahab. No, I don't sell my body for cheap thrills, but I engage in acts, speak words, think thoughts that make me wonder, "Why should God have mercy on me?" For the improper sexual thoughts that linger, for words of anger or holding onto a grudge;

for my broken promises, the times I let people down and went back on my word; for not always being a loving parent or being a selfish spouse, always thinking about me first; for thoughts of greed and not being content with what I have; for putting my hobbies, my work, as higher priorities than my God and his Word. And I lie awake at night, thinking about all I've done and wonder how God could have mercy on me, when I have a past that's as littered as Rahab's? Why should he save me from death and destruction?

How was Rahab spared? She tied a scarlet rope in her window. The author mentions no other significance of the cord and its color. But the deep color of that rope has rich symbolism, doesn't it? Just as the army of Israel passed over the house of Rahab and spared her from death, so also the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites in Goshen who smeared the scarlet blood of a lamb on the doorposts. Just as Rahab and her family were saved from immediate destruction, so also the high priest who walked into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement was spared immediate death because he held in trembling hands a bowl of scarlet blood. All of these point to the cross, and the scarlet blood that stained its wood and soaked the ground. That same blood of Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb, the Great High Priest, covered you at your baptism. Sprinkled with water and the Word the scarlet rope of Christ's blood has been placed in the window of your heart, marking you as forgiven of all your faults and failures and saved for eternal life in heaven. God's wrath passes over you because he does not see your sins. He sees an individual who has been covered in the blood of his Son. Satan and his angels will not pull you down to destruction on the Last Day. You will pass over them and go up to heaven because you have been marked for life in the Promised Land of heaven. The same blood that dripped from his body is the same he offers you to drink in this Holy Supper today to personally reassure you, that you are safe in Christ's blood.

Who am I that the LORD should show this great mercy to me for the things I have done in the past? Because God so loved the world. Which means... God so loved Rahab, God so loved you, God so loved me, that he sent his one and only Son to live a perfect life of obedience for you, to suffer and die and rise for you. Why would he do that? Because it's who he is, the LORD, the God who keeps his promises to have compassion and shower with mercy. He does not shy away from bringing destruction on those who are unrepentant, as he did with Jericho. But he is also the LORD who wants to see sinners repent and turn from their ways so he can save them. Because he enjoys reaching down from heaven and showing grace to the repentant. It's precisely that you are a sinner that he shows mercy on you, so that he can call you redeemed, restored, forgiven, born again through water and the Word, saints washed in the blood of the Lamb.

The question for this morning is not, "Why did two young men visit the home of a prostitute?" But rather, "Why did God show mercy on Rahab?" Because he had a plan for Rahab and that plan included showing Rahab her Savior. Why does he show mercy on me and on you? He had a plan for us. That plan included showing you your Savior and to make you an heir of the Promise Land of heaven through faith in the blood of his Son.

It is very appropriate, therefore, that we will sing as our final hymn this morning, "Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me. Died that I might live on high. Lives that I might never die. Amen.

More facts about Rahab:

The Lord's grace does not end with her personal rescue from Jericho. Rahab is listed in the New Testament book of Hebrews 11:31 among the great heroes of faith. The apostle James also mentions her in his letter, **"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? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."** (2:25,26) The gospel writer Matthew (1:5) records that Rahab was the mother of Boaz (who married Ruth from the book of Ruth). Boaz was the great-grandfather of King David. Imagine that, a prostitute included in the family line of the Savior!