

Rahab – A Woman of Faith



By Karen Witemeyer

(Joshua 2-6)

Peace floated through the evening air and nestled into Rahab's heart while she sat at her loom. A few short years ago, she never would have dreamed that she would find contentment in such a mundane task. A rueful smile touched her lips as she recalled the headstrong, impatient youth she once had been. Life experience had taught her to appreciate the beauty of simplicity. And the scene before her was just that, simply beautiful.

Across the room, her husband tucked their young son under the blanket she had woven for him. He glanced up and captured her gaze. It still amazed her to behold such affection shining from his eyes. Each day with this man was a gift from God, and she savored every moment she shared with him. The added blessing of a child in their lives only served to strengthen their bond.

"Boaz is ready for you to kiss him goodnight, my love." Her husband's softly spoken words drew Rahab from her seat and to the side of the two most important men in her life.

She placed a tender kiss on her son's brow and smiled when a wide-mouthed yawn consumed his face.

"Tell me a story, Mama."

Rahab sat beside her son's sleeping mat and fussed with his covers. "Which story do you want to hear?"

"I want to hear the one about the time Papa saved you

from the crumbling walls."

A warm chuckle rumbled behind her and faded as her husband left to check on their livestock. He knew this story would be long in the telling.

"Are you certain, Boaz? You must have heard that story a hundred times."

"It is my favorite, Mama. Please?"

Unable to resist his passionate entreaty, Rahab gave in to her son's request. Removing the scarlet cord that she always wore at her waist, Rahab laid it across Boaz's chest and fingered it affectionately as her mind drifted back in time.

"It all began with a red cord …"

Rahab loved losing herself in the bustle of the marketplace Hundreds of people meandering through stalls where vendors supplied everything from live goats to dates to clay pots. Traveling merchants added their own goods to the mix, bringing spices, tapestries, and carvings of ivory from distant lands. Human voices blended with the intonations of unhappy livestock. Shopkeepers periodically erupted the steady din with strident proclamations as they hawked their wares.

Chaos reigned all around her, but Rahab didn't care. In fact, it energized her. She loved to shop, and her time here today would be perfect if not for the contemptuous glances of passing women and the lustful leers of the men. But she refused to allow the actions of others ruin her fun. Rahab held her head high and followed her mother through the maze of carts and shops that made up Jericho's market.

They halted at the weaver's booth, and Rahab handed her mother a handful of coins to purchase supplies. Knowing her mother would spend several minutes haggling over the price of flax, Rahab wandered over to the nearby shops. A flash of color caught her eye, and Rahab turned toward the dyer's table to get a better look. A sigh of pure pleasure

escaped her at the marvelous sight before her. Linen and wool cloth came alive in vibrant patterns, like a rainbow captured and put on display. Cords in every imaginable hue hung from an overhead beam, exemplifying the dyer's mastery of his craft. Rich purples and blues, brilliant oranges, yellows, and greens danced in the breeze. It was too beautiful to resist. She ran her hand along the tasseled edges of the rainbow, and luxuriated in the softness than caressed her skin. When her hand reached the end of the row, she froze, mesmerized by a dramatic crimson cord. It called to her. So much of her life was dirty and sordid—what a gift it would be to have something bright and colorful to cheer her days.

Rahab had just pulled the cord free from its peg to take a closer look when her mother darted from behind her and slapped the cord out of her hand.

"We are here to buy supplies for the family, not trinkets for you to use to attract your customers."

Rahab jerked a coin out of the small bag tied at her waist and defiantly tossed it to the dyer. Clenching her teeth, she grabbed the crimson cord and flung it around her neck.

"It is my customers who pay for the family's supplies, Mother. If I decide to spend some of that money on myself, you are in no position to stop me."

Her mother grunted and stomped off, leaving the full cart behind for her daughter to navigate through the busy streets alone.

Rahab sighed over her hollow victory. She knew her mother disapproved of the work she did at the inn. Truth be told, she disapproved of it herself. Selling her body to men for their pleasure night after night was degrading at best and dangerous at its worst. She would never admit it to her family, but there was a part of her soul that had shriveled up and died on her first night there, three years ago. She had mourned that loss every night since.

Shrugging off her melancholy thoughts, Rahab took a deep breath, straightened her shoulders, and lifted the handles of the cart so she could wheel it to her family's home a short distance away. Regrets would serve no good purpose now. She did what she had to do. A battle injury had left her father crippled a few years ago, and her mother's weaving money didn't stretch far enough to meet the needs of a family of ten. At one time, her parents held out hope that Rahab's comeliness would attract a wealthy husband and bring an end to their financial woes. And while she did have several suitors, those who possessed sufficient means were unwilling to take on the responsibility of her entire family.

Unable to stand the sight of her brothers and sisters begging along the road, Rahab took matters into her own hands. When a local tavern owner offered her a partnership, she accepted. His inn was built into Jericho's wall, near the city gate, and although the location was perfectly suited for such a business, he wished to expand his profits. He offered Rahab a house of her own, located directly above the inn, where she could entertain the clients he would send her way for a percentage of her fee. She would also be expected to help out at the inn when not otherwise occupied upstairs.

Shoving aside her dignity, Rahab took on the role of family provider and met with grand success. Now her family had food to eat, a comfortable home, and her sisters boasted acceptable dowries. Yes, it had needed to be done, and she would do it again. She took pride in protecting her family from poverty. If her own heart longed for someone to protect *her*, she refused to acknowledge it.

After delivering the majority of the supplies to her family's home in the heart of the city, Rahab pulled the cart containing the few remaining items to her own home. She set the cart down away from the street and carried her basket of foodstuffs up the narrow, stone staircase that led to her room at

the top of the wall. When she dropped her basket on the lone table that occupied the center of her home, a flare of color caught her eye. She had forgotten all about the cord. Rahab lifted it from her neck and moved toward the window. She wove the cord through her fingers and marveled at how the strands glowed in the sunlight like a string of rubies. Beautiful. She had been beautiful once. Perhaps with this cord she could reclaim some of what she had lost.

Rahab tore off her old, colorless sash and eagerly replaced it with the fine new scarlet cord, knotting it over her right hip. With childish abandon, she spun around in a circle watching the ends fly out in a graceful arc. Her laugher bounced off the walls, and for a moment the pain of her past fell away as she reveled in the joy of innocent pleasure.

Dizziness overcame her, and Rahab collapsed on the pile of animal skins that served as her bed. When the room stopped spinning, reality returned. Two loads of flax waited downstairs to be brought up to her roof. Since her home was situated at the top of the wall, she possessed an ideal spot for drying the flax that her mother needed for her weaving. Her mother might not approve of Rahab's occupation, but she seemed to have no qualms about utilizing her daughter's resources.

Rahab retrieved the sheaves and spread them out to dry then paused to reflect upon the heavens. Red and orange streaks painted the sky as the sun made its final decent past the horizon. She closed her eyes and tried to capture the scene in her mind so that she might take it with her. Night held ugliness, and her imagination was her only weapon. Work wouldn't wait, though. She opened her eyes and drifted reluctantly toward the stairs. Perhaps tonight would be better, for she had more than imagination to sustain her. She fingered the cord at her side. Today she would take a piece of the sunset with her.



Rahab descended the stairs to the inn as the colors began to fade from the evening sky. She entered the main room and set to work distributing ale and wine. As she circulated among the tables, she picked up bits of the patrons' conversations.

"… saw them camped at Shittim, just beyond the Jordan. They must be planning to attack…"

"… the God of Israel will not allow them to see defeat. Remember what they did to Sihon? When he refused to grant them safe passage through his land, the Israelites utterly destroyed him and his entire army. Now Israel sits on our doorstep …"

"… even our wall cannot guarantee our safety. They had walled cities in Bashan, too, but Israel took possession of sixty of their cities, each with walls, gates, and bars. Their God is too powerful for us …"

"… can even dry up the seas! This God protects his people like none other …"

At every table the talk was the same. Men who usually sat around boasting of their latest conquest or their heroic feats in battle now trembled as they discussed the threat of war with Israel. Seasoned warriors who would cut off their own arm before admitting fear of an opponent, now worried like old women because the God of Israel apparently had his eye set on Jericho.

What would it be like to serve a God who truly cared about his people? A God who saved them from their enemies? Would such a God attend to the individual needs of his people as well? Would he protect someone like her?

The only gods Rahab had known were the golden images set up in the local temple. The priests offered sacrifices and prayed to these images, but as far as she could tell, these so-called gods were mere statues empowered only by superstitious minds. Rahab had always considered herself far

too sensible to believe in such foolishness. But a God with the power to part the Red Sea, rescue his people from slavery, and utterly destroy every enemy that stood in their way—that was a God she could believe in.

"Rahab! Quit your dreaming and get back to work." The harsh voice of the tavern owner slashed through her thoughts. "Two strangers just came in and are sitting at the table in the back. See if you can interest them in something more than a drink." With a lascivious wink, he shoved her in the direction of the newcomers.

Rahab stumbled forward. Her partner snickered. She bit her tongue to restrain the retort that sprang to her lips. One day she would give that oaf a piece of her mind, but now was not the time. She had customers waiting. She ran her fingers through her hair to ensure that she looked her best then sashayed to the rear of the room.

When she reached the back table, Rahab slid into a seductive pose and welcomed the two men to the establishment. "Can I offer you two gentlemen some refreshment?"

The first man mumbled something about a bowl of stew and some wine while his gaze darted around the room. In striking contrast, the man beside him stared at a single location—her face. Rahab should have encouraged him, but there was something strange in the way he looked at her. Unlike most men of her experience, there was nothing lecherous or lustful in his stare. He simply eyed her with admiration, as if gazing upon a sunrise or a field of flowers. Instead of bending closer to proposition him, she found herself blushing and turning away without even taking his order.

Sneaking a glance over her shoulder, she watched as the first man frowned and demanded the other's attention.

"Get your mind off that harlot, Salmon, and focus on what we came here to do."

Still close enough to overhear his heated whisper, Rahab's heart died a little at his words.

"She is a beautiful woman, and you will not speak ill of her in my presence. Besides, I have an odd feeling about her, as if she is part of the reason we are here."

His friend snorted his disbelief, but Rahab paid no further attention to him. Salmon. His name was Salmon. She repeated it over and over in her mind as she floated back to the kitchen. He had defended her and treated her with respect. How long had it been since that had happened? Could this man actually look past her occupation to see the woman beneath? Her common sense told her no, but her heart sang with hope.

As she bent over the fire to retrieve some stew for Salmon and his companion, a young boy came in, loaded with an armful of firewood.

"Rahab, have you heard?" Without giving her a chance to answer, the excited boy rambled on. "The king suspects that the Israelites have sent spies into Jericho! Can you believe it? They could be anywhere." Straining his neck to peer through the kitchen door, the boy continued. "Do you think I could take a look around the inn to see if any strangers are around? I would love to be the hero who catches them. Soldiers are searching for them this very minute."

Panic stole Rahab's breath. The two men she had just met must be the Israelite spies. She couldn't explain how she knew, outside of the fact that they were strangers and one seemed to be very nervous, yet Rahab's intuition screamed at her to do something! But what?

First things first. She snatched the boy's sleeve and reined him in before the eager lad could enter the main hall.

"Run along home before your mother starts to worry," Rahab insisted. "Let the soldiers deal with the spies."

"But…"

Rahab cut off his protest by dragging the disappointed

child to the door and tossing him out. While Salmon's consideration toward her demanded that she respond in kind, her desire to help them went beyond simply returning a kindness. This could be her one chance meet a God who cared and fought for his people. Maybe if she protected these two spies, their God would protect her.

Taking a deep breath to calm her nerves, Rahab collected the two crockery bowls she had filled with stew and sauntered through the dining area as if nothing unusual had occurred. When she arrived at the table, she set the bowls down and leaned over to whisper in Salmon's ear as if flirting with him.

"You must come with me. Now."

Salmon's startled gaze collided with hers.

"Please trust me," she continued. "The king's soldiers are searching for you. If they find you, they will execute you." Rahab gnawed her lower lip while she waited for Salmon to convey her message to his compatriot.

Discouraged by the fierce scowl on the second man's face, Rahab tried desperately to convince him of her sincerity. "I know you have no reason to believe me, but I vow in the name of your God that I will help you escape."

"What do you know of our God?" he spat at her.

Rahab faced the man, undeterred by his scorn. "I know that he has given you this land, and if I want to earn his favor, I must protect the two of you."

The belligerent companion looked taken aback by her response, and his harsh gaze transformed into one of grudging respect.

Returning her attention to Salmon, Rahab relaxed her stance and pleaded with the man who had shown her kindness. "Please. I know a safe place where you can hide, but we must leave quickly. The soldiers will be here soon."

Uneasiness fluttered in her stomach while the two men

discussed their options in hushed tones. They were taking to long to decide. Rahab opened her mouth to urge them further, but Salmon looked up at her and nodded. "We will come."

"You must be mad, Salmon." His companion shook his head, yet a smile softened his features.

"It would be madness to turn our back on the help that the Lord God has sent us. Let us go." Rahab needed no further urging. She boldly took hold of Salmon's hand and led the way out. His hand felt warm and strong in hers, and he even gave her fingers a gentle squeeze of encouragement. She could well imagine his hands capable of protecting those he held dear. If she was the rescuer, why was it that being with these men suddenly made *her* feel safe for the first time in years?

The sun had dipped below the horizon, yet its glow lingered to illuminate the way for the three fugitives navigating the stairs to Rahab's roof. The three ducked below the edge of the half-wall that formed a rim around the housetop so as not to be visible to the king's soldiers swarming the city. No one dared speak as they strained to hear evidence of possible pursuers.

When several minutes passed without the sound of footsteps, Rahab peeked over the edge of the short wall and searched the darkening streets for any sign of the king's men. Assured that they were safe for the moment, Rahab crawled over to the piles of flax she had placed on the roof earlier in the day.

"What are you doing?"

Rahab jumped. Salmon had followed her. His nearness set her pulse racing again, and she wondered if it would ever resume its normal pace if she managed to survive this evening of intrigue.

"My mother is a weaver," Rahab explained, "and it is

common knowledge that I allow her to dry flax upon my roof. If the two of you lie down, I can cover you with the flax stalks, and no one would suspect anything amiss. It will simply appear that I have laid out the stalks to dry as is my custom."

Salmon nodded and helped her unbind the flax. The long stalks fell free around their feet. Salmon turned to Rahab and gently cupped her face in his hands. "May I know the name of our rescuer?"

Hoping that the shadows of twilight hid the blush that surely graced her cheeks, Rahab dropped her head. "I am Rahab."

Salmon tenderly lifted her chin until her eyes met his. "I am Salmon, and my companion over there is Tamir. Thank you, Rahab, for your aid. I know you have defied your king and put yourself at great risk by sheltering us. Your courageous actions will be remembered among my people for generations."

Before Rahab had the chance to reveal that she wanted more than just to be remembered, a whispered warning came from across the housetop where Tamir kept watch.

"Soldiers approach. We must hurry."

Rahab pointed to where the two men should lie, and the spies scrambled into position. She flung flax on top of them as fast as she could. Trotting footsteps resounded in the street below. They were getting close. Too close. She needed to be inside before they knocked on her door. She strained to see if any portions of the men's bodies remained uncovered, but it was too dark to tell. Thankfully, the guards would face the same dilemma.

Rahab sprinted down the steps to her house. Only minutes after she had closed the door, an angry pounding echoed through her room.

"Rahab the Harlot! Open this door in the name of the king!"

Rahab took a deep breath, and an idea sparked in her

mind. She mussed her hair and tore off her outer clothing. Seduction. The guards were men, weren't they? She would charge into this battle on her terms. She grabbed a blanket and wrapped it around herself. Willing her nerves to settle, she strutted to the door as if a customer stood on the other side. She opened the door and feigned surprise, pouring as much innocence into her gaze as she could muster.

"What have I done that you come here seeking to break down my door?"

"The king sends this message: 'Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.'"

Someone must have seen her leave the inn with the strangers. She had to tell the soldiers something logical to send them on their way or else they would insist on searching for the spies. She hoped her appearance would cause the soldiers to believe her ruse and assume that the Israelites had recently left her bed.

"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, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them."

No sooner had the words left her mouth than one of the men stomped up the stairs to examine the roof. Rahab wielded every seductive weapon at her disposal to keep the others from following. She winked and flirted and even allowed the blanket to "accidentally" slip down her bare shoulder until the soldier returned and reported that he had seen nothing unusual.

When the men left to follow the imaginary trail of the spies, Rahab closed the door and sagged against its solid support. They believed her ruse. Israel's God must be watching over her so that she, in turn, could watch over Salmon and Tamir. Nothing else could explain her narrow escape. As if to punctuate her thoughts, the heavy thud of the city gate echoed

through the darkness as it slammed shut for the night. Rahab and her refugees would be safe until morning.

After a time, Jericho slept, and Rahab deemed it safe to check on her charges. She redressed, collected some blankets, and then climbed to the roof.

"It is safe to come out now," she whispered as she bent over the pile of flax. "The soldiers have left the city and are searching for you down the Jordan road."

The stalks of flax quivered. Like butterflies shedding their cocoons, Salmon and Tamir emerged from beneath the flax, stretched their limbs, and brushed away the remnants of the plants that clung to their clothing.

Rahab paced. Now would be the perfect time to ask them. She had spared their lives after all. Surely they wouldn't refuse her humble request. Her family depended on her.

"She said it was safe, yet she paces like a caged animal," Tamir grumbled. "I am beginning to fear that our trust has been misplaced."

Rahab halted mid-step. "You are indeed safe. It is just that something weighs on my mind, and I am unsure of how best to broach the subject with the two of you."

Salmon laid a warm hand on her arm and gently encouraged her to sit upon one of the blankets she had brought. "You need not fear us, Rahab. You have saved our lives. We will listen to whatever you have to say."

He sounded so sincere. He rubbed her arm in a soothing motion, one that inspired confidence and a sense of belonging she hadn't experienced in years. She wanted to lean back, rest her head on his shoulder, and let the harsh realities of life disappear, but she had a duty to her family. Disaster loomed and she must protect them.

"I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us," she said, "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 and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

Rahab paused to gauge their response. Tamir sat with arms folded across his chest, but his perpetual frown seemed to have softened a bit. Salmon nodded encouragement, so Rahab took a deep breath and plunged ahead.

"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."

Without the slightest hesitation, Salmon took her hands in his and fervently vowed, "Our lives for your lives!"

Tamir displayed no great eagerness, yet nevertheless, agreed to offer his protection with his own provision. "If you don't tell what we are doing," he said, "we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land."

Rahab's breath came out in a whoosh and her shoulders slumped as the emotional burden she had been carrying fell away. "Thank you. I will hold you to your promise." Rahab stood to return to her room. "Get what sleep you can, then come into my house before the sun rises, and I will help you leave the city unseen."

Salmon's words stopped her before she reached the stairs. "May the Lord God bless you, Rahab, for the mercy you have shown us this day."

"That is all I have ever wanted," Rahab whispered more to herself than to him. "That is all I have ever wanted."

After a few hours of fitful sleep, Rahab awoke to the sound of her name whispered close to her ear. As her heavy eyelids fluttered open, she caught a glimpse of Salmon bending over her, his eyes filled with tenderness. Was she still dreaming?

"Rahab. It is time for us to go."

But I don't want you to go. Her mind was slow to wake up, but her heart immediately protested the loss of this man from her life.

"Hurry up, woman. We must leave while darkness still covers our escape." Tamir's impatient voice successfully scattered the last vestiges of sleep clouding her mind.

Rahab threw off her covers and accepted Salmon's hand as he assisted her to her feet. Without releasing his hand, Rahab led him to the window where she had secured a rope to the beam that bisected the portal. She grasped the coil of hemp in her free hand and tossed it out the window.

"My house is built into the city wall," she said. "If you climb down this rope, you will be able to make your escape."

Rahab looked into Salmon's eyes one last time, knowing that her face conveyed the message her mouth refused to say. *Do not forget me.*

Salmon sat on the widow ledge and gathered the rope into his hands. His gaze became fierce as he spoke the words that her heart would cling to over the next several days. "I *will* return for you, Rahab. You have my vow. I will not allow any harm to befall you or your family."

Rahab nodded, and a single tear slid down her cheek as she watched him swing over the ledge and out of her life.

"Wait!" Rahab rushed forward and put her head through the opening, desperate for one last moment with him. Salmon tightened his grip and braced his feet against the wall halting his progress. His eyes reflected the same reluctance to leave that she felt in her heart.

"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."

"Thank you." Salmon slipped from her view and vanished into the pre-dawn darkness at the bottom of the wall.

When the rope lay slack once again, Tamir climbed into the window to take his turn. Rahab expected him to dive out and escape her presence as fast as he could, but he paused and stared at her as if trying to decipher a riddle. He reached out and grasped the red cord that dangled from her waist.

"This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us," he said, "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 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. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

"Agreed," Rahab replied. "Let it be as you say."

Rahab bent her head and untied the cord at her waist. By the time she looked up, Tamir had disappeared. She hoisted the rope back into her room and hid it under her pallet. Then she returned to the window and tied the scarlet cord where the rope had been.

I will wait here for your return, Salmon.

She had three days to convince her family to wait here with her.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Rahab? You speak of treason!"

Her mother's reaction did not surprise Rahab, although she wished her mother could see beyond the immediate threat

from the king to the certainty of death when the army of Israel laid siege to Jericho.

Her father, on the other hand, seemed to be thinking over her words more carefully. "It is too early to tell if you have acted with wisdom or folly, daughter. We will wait to see what these Israelites do. If they attack, we will come and take refuge in your home. If not, we will remain as we are."

"If that is your decision, Father, I will honor it, but let me at least take the children with me. No one will think it odd that they visit their sister. Besides, we cannot know how the God of Israel will deliver Jericho into the hands of his people. He may do so in such a manner that no warning is given. It may be too late if you delay."

"I refuse to allow the children to be exposed to what goes on in your house, Rahab. They will remain with me." Her mother's strident voice pierced Rahab's heart.

"I realize you think poorly of me, Mother, but be assured that as of last night I no longer conduct business in my home. I plan to make a new life for myself with the Israelites, and I have risked much to offer you the same."

Her mother turned her back, and Rahab interpreted her movement as a signal that it was time to depart. As she walked to the door, Rahab offered one final plea. "My home will remain open to you should you change your mind."

Rahab purchased abundant supplies, not knowing how long she would have to wait until the Israelites arrived. She set aside enough to feed her family also, still hoping that they would appear at her door. Three days had passed since the spies' departure, and the anticipation of imminent attack poisoned her with worry. If only her family were here.

That afternoon, the knock she longed to hear sounded upon her door. Rahab flung it open and saw her eldest sister with her betrothed.

"Will you shelter us, Rahab?"

Clasping her sister to her breast in a warm embrace, Rahab struggled to find her voice. "Certainly. Come in. Come in. What made you decide to come?"

"Have you not heard the news?" her sister asked incredulously. "All of Jericho fears for their lives. The Israelites have crossed the Jordan River and are now camped on our eastern border. In Gilgal."

So the time was at hand. Rahab dreaded the destruction that approached, but at the same time, she welcomed the freedom it would bring to her. At least her sister would be safe.

"Has the king sent out our armies to meet them?" Rahab asked.

"No. In fact, he gave the order that the gates be sealed. No one is to come in or go out." Rahab's sister leaned forward, wonder evident on her face. "Oh, Rahab. You were right about the God of Israel. They say he stopped the waters of the Jordan even though they were running at flood stage. As soon as the priests who carried Israel's religious treasures stepped into the river, the flow was cut off. Word came to us that the waters piled up in a heap somewhere near Zarethan. Then after all of the Israelites crossed over on dry ground, the priests carried the ark out of the Jordan, and the waters rushed back into place. The hand of the Lord is powerful indeed, and now all of Jericho trembles in fear."

Rahab clasped her sister's hands. "I am so thankful that the two of you decided to come here. This is the only place that will be safe from the attack." Rahab glanced over to the scarlet cord in her window. "What of Mother and Father and the rest of the family? Will they come?"

"I don't know. They were still arguing about it when I left. Surely Mother will swallow her pride and bring the children here."

Hope withered in Rahab's heart. "Mother hates what I

have become. I wouldn't be surprised if she refused."

"She feels guilty that she could not take care of us, you especially, the way she wanted," her sister said. "She cried the day you left, and every time your money bought something for us, her guilt intensified. She doesn't hate you, Rahab. She believes that she has failed you."

Rahab wanted to believe it, more than anything, but years of bitterness cast shadows of doubt over her.

Another knock echoed through the room. She caught her breath. Could it be? The door swung open, and her family poured into the room, every last one of them. Only one hung back, waiting to be invited.

"Will you let a foolish old woman take refuge with you?" her mother asked, not quite meeting her daughter's eyes.

Rahab embraced her mother, and in that moment, the wall of resentment and shame both women had spent years constructing began to crack. Healing seeped into Rahab's heart, and although her pain didn't disappear, a balm of peace soothed her wounds.

Mother and daughter wiped tears from their eyes and turned to join their family hand-in-hand. Awkwardness tarried between them as they joined the discussion of what war with Israel would look like, but with her family together again, Rahab felt like she had come home.

No one had guessed that warriors and priests would partake in a peaceful march around Jericho. Yet four days later, Israel made their first appearance doing just that. Confusion reigned in Rahab's house. What were the Israelites doing? What could they hope to achieve by parading around the city?

Rahab watched the procession from her window. Seven priests carrying rams' horns led the Ark of the Covenant with half of the fighting men in front of them and the remaining army behind them. They moved in utter silence except for the

eerie sound of the trumpets blown by the priests. Rahab thought she spotted Salmon in the crowd, but he passed by before she could verify what her heart wanted to believe.

The next five days saw a repeat of the first day's events. Israel marched around the city while their priests blew horns. Each day, Rahab and her family braced for an attack that never came.

The seventh day began like all the rest. However, when the Israelites completed their circle around Jericho, they did not return to camp. This time they continued marching. Would this be the day the attack finally fell upon her city? The army marched around Jericho a second time … and a third … and a fourth … and again, and again, and again. Seven times they came and went until at last they halted by the city gate. The priest gave a mighty blast on their trumpets and the leader of Israel called out, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!"

All the people gave a loud shout and the priests blew their horns. The roar drove Rahab from the window. She stumbled back with her hands over her ears and huddled with her family.

"Is that a shout or an earthquake?" her father yelled. "The walls seem to be shaking from the force of it."

"The walls aren't shaking, they're falling!" one of Rahab's brothers called out.

All around them, the walls crashed down. Stone and mortar disintegrated, showering the family with debris. Three of their walls collapsed and parts of the floor fell away. Rahab tried to block out the screams of her neighbors pinned beneath the rubble, but the silence of death that followed was worse.

Rahab lifted her head. Such destruction! Jericho's mighty wall lay in pieces. She looked to the right and to the left. Her room was the only portion still standing.

Israel's army charged into the city and destroyed everything in their path. Rahab tried to shelter the younger

children from the violence surrounding them as the warriors claimed the city. The children whimpered and clung to their older sister.

"Look at the window," Rahab said. "Do you see that red cord? That is the sign that we are to be spared. Keep your eyes on that cord, and remember that the God of Israel will protect us."

They all focused on the symbol of their salvation and waited for help to come.

Rahab heard a muffled noise that sounded like her name. She strained her ears, trying to decipher from whence it came. Again she heard it. Rahab disentangled herself from the grip of her siblings and stood. She took a few hesitant steps toward where her door used to be and scanned the mayhem below for a familiar face.

"Rahab!" This time there was no mistaking the sound of her name.

"Salmon?"

All at once he was there, bounding up the damaged staircase, sword drawn, ready to protect her and see to the safety of her family. To her, he was a glorious vision of salvation and hope, but the terrified screams behind her indicated that her family thought him an enemy who had come to destroy. In the back of her mind, Rahab heard a voice telling her to comfort and reassure her loved ones, but her feet followed the instructions of her heart and carried her swiftly into the open arms of her rescuer.

"You came." Rahab wondered at the miracle of the man in her arms.

"And I shall never leave you again, Rahab."

"Salmon, there is no time for romance. Joshua has ordered that the city be burned to the ground." Tamir's smile belied his scolding tone as he entered what was left of Rahab's home. "We must get these people back to camp."

Salmon and Tamir helped the youngsters navigate the crumbling stairs while the adults picked their way through the wreckage behind them. Rahab hung back for a moment, surveying her surroundings. Everywhere she looked, Jericho's wall lay decimated, but the scarlet cord in her window waved securely in the breeze. Yes, this was a God worth believing in.

Salmon returned to find her examining the remains of her house. "Is there anything you wish to take with you?"

"No. I gladly leave all of this behind to begin anew with you and your people." Rahab turned to follow him down the stairs, then changed her mind and ran back to her window.

"Where are you going?" Salmon called.

"I was wrong. There is one thing I want to take with me." Rahab untied the red cord from her window and placed it once again around her waist. "I want to keep this as a symbol of the Lord's faithfulness and power. Your God is magnificent."

"He is not just *my* God, Rahab. From this day forth, he will be *your* God as well. You now belong to him."

Even though death and destruction surrounded her, she had never felt more alive or full of hope. A future with this man and his God would be grand, indeed.

Boaz fought to keep his eyes open. "Papa was your hero, wasn't he, Mama?

Rahab smiled as she replaced the well-worn cord around her waist. "Yes, my son. He most certainly was, and he remains my hero to this very day."

Salmon joined them and rested his hands on Rahab's shoulders. "Your mother was my hero as well, Boaz. Without her courage and quick thinking, Uncle Tamir and I would have perished. She believed in us and in our God when we were still strangers to her. You see, son, your mother is a hero, too. A hero of faith."

Becoming Women of Faith

Who would have guessed that a pagan harlot would be one of only two women listed among the giants of faith in Hebrews 11? This same woman became the great-great-grandmother of David and therefore part of the ancestral line of Christ. If God's grace can transform Rahab the harlot into a model of faith for all generations, imagine what he can do with you and me!

No matter what your background, God longs for a relationship with you built on faith, and he offers Rahab's story as a model for you to emulate.

Great faith does not require great knowledge or a perfect life.

Rahab did not grow up with the teachings of the Mosaic Law. She gleaned information about the God of Israel from the fantastic stories that travelers bandied about town, and she hungered to learn more of these people and their God.

We are all given different spiritual gifts, and according to Paul, knowledge and faith are separate gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-9). The presence of one does not necessitate the presence of the other. One person may know a great deal about God yet struggle with the intimacy of a personal faith. Another may have a deep sense of faith even though she lacks godly knowledge. Ideally, these two people should come together to share their message of faith or knowledge with each other so that both may grow and mature in Christ. This is why churches were established, that we might encourage, strengthen, and teach one another according to what the Spirit has given us.

The apostle Paul taught that we need not understand all the mysteries of God before we choose to believe, for the core of our faith rests on a single truth. Speaking to the church in

Corinth he said, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). God does not expect us to have everything figured out. Such a thing is impossible. However, he does expect us to believe in him and accept the sacrifice of his Son because "… without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

Does this mean that if we have faith, we need not thirst for knowledge? In answer, Peter shows us that faith is just the beginning:

> Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, *knowledge*; and to *knowledge*, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in *increasing measure*, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-8, emphasis added).

We must first believe in our sovereign God and in his Son, Jesus Christ. Once this foundation is laid, everything else is built upon it. Our faith must continue to grow along with our knowledge and all the other fruits of the Spirit so that our souls may flourish.

In the same way that Rahab's knowledge was imperfect, so was her life. Yet she did not allow her shameful past to stand in the way of her developing faith. Her story is a powerful testimony to God's willingness to forgive and use flawed people to accomplish his purposes.

Great faith does not require a perfect life. However, it does demand a heart that strives for holiness. "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be

holy in all you do, for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:14-16). We should never be satisfied with our Christian walk, for when we stop to rest on our laurels, we are no longer moving toward the Father. This journey will not be complete until Jesus returns to take us home. We may take wrong turns, stumble, or occasionally lose our way, but the journey never stops. We learn from mistakes, repent and make changes in our lives, encourage others, and always look for the footprints of our guide who, himself, is the Way.

Great faith requires action.

The book of James speaks strongly about the connection between faith and deeds. In chapter two of his letter, James gives two examples of people who demonstrated their faith through their actions. The first is Abraham, the father of Israel. Who is the second example James presents? None other than our friend Rahab. Listen to how he uses the story of Rahab to illustrate and support his point: "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" (James 2:25-26). Rahab's deeds demonstrated her faith. Because of her willingness to act on her faith, she and her family were saved and God's will was carried out against Jericho. If she had believed in God's power but did nothing to protect her family, they would have perished.

We initially receive our faith by opening ourselves to the gospel. Romans 10:17 explains, "… faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." We must first hear the good news and then make the decision to believe it. However, James is quick to remind us that the process does not end there. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"

(James 1:22). Why? "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Romans 2:13). Our faith should be so much a part of our identity that it spills over into all aspects of our life—our speech, our behavior, and our attitudes.

Sometimes within the fellowship of believers, we confuse faith in God with our beliefs on particular religious topics. While different interpretations are to be expected, it is all too easy to get caught up in arguments over doctrinal issues and to forget that the core of our faith is supposed to unify us with Christ and each other. Our actions and words end up inflicting pain instead of bestowing encouragement. This has been a struggle since the first century. Paul gave a firm warning to the Galatians who were dividing over the hot issue of their day—whether or not Gentile Christians should be circumcised. Paul confronted them with these words, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6). What a powerful statement! The way we express our faith through our actions and reactions toward others holds great significance. Paul went so far as to say it is the only thing that counts. If we want to please God, we must not use our faith to prove ourselves correct. No. Like Christ, we must instead display our faith through love and compassion for others with a spirit of encouragement and unity, even if it means we must agree to disagree on certain doctrinal issues.

Faith, love, and deeds are all linked. To have faith without deeds or to have deeds without love is to miss a vital piece of Christianity. Faith alone is not enough. Even demons have faith (James 2:19). Christians are those who express their faith through godly actions motivated by love, worshiping the Almighty with their lives.

Great faith holds fast even when the world around you is falling apart.

Rahab's world literally crumbled around her when the Israelites let out their mighty shout. She and her family trembled in fear, but their eyes stayed glued to the scarlet cord that symbolized God's promise to protect them. In our lives, the world does not usually fall down around us in a physical sense, but we often have emotional catastrophes that carry much the same weight. We must follow Rahab's example and focus not on the turmoil around us, but on the steady promise of God's protection. Such trust in God's faithfulness will imbue us with courage and strength to endure the trials that "… have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be found genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:7).

Standing firm in our faith is necessary for spiritual victory. Had Rahab and her family panicked and left the sanctuary of her home, they would have met certain death. Instead they embraced their newfound faith and received salvation.

The same is true for us today. As spiritual warriors, faith is our shield in our battle against evil. We must cling tightly to this gift of God and not allow it to be wrenched from our grasp, leaving us vulnerable to the weapons of Satan. Instead, we should heed Paul's advice and share his joy. "But thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:57-58). God has already granted us ultimate victory through his Son, and all he asks of us is that we believe.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen

you with power

through his Spirit in your inner being,

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

~Ephesians 3:16-17a~

Questions to consider:

- What can you do during the week to nurture an intimate faith with the Lord?
- How do your daily actions reflect (or not reflect) your faith?
- Is guilt over past sin standing in the way of your spiritual growth?
- How can you strive to be holy through your attitudes and actions?
- When times get tough, how do you react? How does your shield of faith protect you when your world seems to be falling apart?

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