

You Cannot Know God Without This

Have You Been Surprised by How God Does Things?

Back in 1999, when we were wondering what would happen to our computers at the arrival of the new millennium, a friend, Pastor Mark Milwee asked me to go with him to Russia and teach at a small Christian college in Moscow. At the time, our family income was very small, and we basically lived paycheck to paycheck. To go, it would cost \$4,500. Pastor Mark told me that I could cover the cost of the trip through fundraising. I had never done that before, and I was completely overwhelmed by the prospect of trying to find enough donors to pay for the trip. Not only that, I didn't feel competent enough to teach an entire college course on the subject I was given. Pastor Mark reassured me that the Lord would work out everything for me but in this matter, my faith in God was weak and I was afraid I would fail. Have you ever come up against a task, a difficulty, a challenge that shook your faith in God and forced you to reevaluate what you believed about Him? Today, we are going to take a look at one of the unsung heroes of the Bible, someone who very few who knew her would have believed she had it in her to become the sort of person she did and impact the course of history. Here is the Big Idea for today: Cling to your faith in Christ no matter what you face.

Perhaps you have heard of this person. Her name is almost never one parents give their children, not like Ruth or Deborah or Mary. Perhaps it is because of her first occupation. According to the Bible she was a prostitute. Ancient Jewish writers sometimes described her as an innkeeper, which is possible as the Hebrew word for a female provider of room and board is spelled similarly to a prostitute. I find it hard to believe she wasn't a prostitute, given how terrible it sounds for one of the great women of faith to have been so. The Bible doesn't shy away from the facts, even if they are embarrassing details that make some of its greatest people look bad. Why tell us of David's adultery or Solomon's corruption or Peter's denial of Jesus or Mary's loss of faith in Jesus? The facts are there, humiliating or not because they tell the truth about God's people and so it is with Rahab. A prostitute became a hero, a legendary woman of faith.

The nation of Israel was about to begin taking the promised land. They already had a taste of battle, having beaten back the Amalekites and the Midianites. Now at the edge of the natural boundary to the promised land, the Jordan River, Israel, under the leadership of Joshua was ready to conquer the people of Palestine. In preparation, Joshua secretly sent two spies to find out about the defenses and military strength of the first city they were going to attack, Jericho. **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.** (Joshua 2: 1 NIV) Apparently they were the only guests and somehow the king of Jericho caught wind that Hebrews were staying with her. **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."** (Joshua 2: 2-3 NIV) This of course was a great moment of crisis for Rahab. She had the two spies in her house and her king was ordering Rahab to turn them over to him. Was her life at risk if she refused? Where did loyalty to her country and patriotism fit into what she was about to do? The greatest moments of our lives often are a crisis of belief and a determination of values.

For Rahab, the most obvious response would have been for her to turn over the men to the king. That decision was easy. Send word and soldiers would have either killed the spies or whisked them away. No muss, no fuss. Most of us live within the no muss, no fuss realm. We do what is comfortable, easy, unremarkable. We have our routines, and we keep at them. Faith seems like an unnecessary component to what we do, certainly faith in God feels irrelevant to our regular schedule. But when those moments come that change the order of things, that alter the path your life is taking, faith in God becomes the determining factor...it is either faith in God or not and where you go from there is decided by that one determination. If you know this particular detail of the life changing moment for Rahab, bear with me. There was a variable that made safety a moving target. Let Rahab tell you in her own words what it was. **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 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. 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.** (Joshua 2: 8-11 NIV)

When it comes to understanding others and why they do what they do, you have to be careful because there is always one variable, one bit of information about them that you don't know, and it could be the deciding factor in what they do. The same is true with you. You may do something that seems irrational to everyone else, but it only appears irrational because they don't know something about you that is impacting how you behave. The king may have assumed Rahab would tell him where the spies were because she was a loyal citizen or afraid of the wrath of the king or some other reason, but she didn't. Instead she hid the spies up on the roof and lied to the soldiers who came for them. Rahab told them Hebrews had already left and gone outside the city gates, but she did not know where they had gone from there. She even told the soldiers to hurry because they might catch the spies. Now, what did Rahab do? She of course lied. Many Bible teachers and Christian leaders, including John Calvin have insisted that Rahab sinned. Yet, the Bible never implies, not in Joshua or in the New Testament where she is mentioned three times, any wrongdoing on her part. In fact, she is celebrated. Lying is described several times in the Bible, and on some occasions it is either not condemned or at least in one instance lauded. Abraham and Isaac both lied about their wives while they were living in a foreign land. Each said his wife was his sister because of the fear their wives would be violently taken from them due to their beauty. You may argue that was a pretty lame thing to do, especially since word eventually got out that the women were their wives but consider the case of the Hebrew midwives. They had been ordered by Pharaoh to murder any Jewish boys they helped deliver but they didn't. When confronted by Pharaoh, they lied and said that Hebrew women give birth so quickly that they can't get to their homes in time to help deliver the babies. This was a whopper of a lie and yet God loved their actions so much that He blessed them and gave them families of their own.

Lest you think I am advocating for lying, I am not. But in times of war and when the safety of others is at stake, lying, and yes even killing is permitted by God. Let us make something clear. Our goal, even our primary determination, is to follow Christ all the way through. We are not to follow a doctrine or an accepted rule or even a teaching, although all three are helpful and useful, but we are to follow Christ above all. Many have pet views of the Scripture or opinions of how we should do things, but it is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who decides for us what we are to do or how we are to act. Remember the Apostle Peter who complained to God about eating unclean foods in the vision, foods that were forbidden to be eaten in the Old Testament law and yet, at that moment the Lord told Peter to eat, and it was right for Peter to eat. The vision of course was given to Peter to correct his view about interacting with non-Jews because the Lord wanted Peter to share with a household of non-Jews the Gospel. Peter had to decide if he was to follow his view of God and God "things" or follow God Himself and do what the Lord told him to do. I find this amusing, but I wonder if certain Christians with a particular view of the timing and method of Christ's return turn out to be wrong, will they refuse to go with Jesus because He didn't come like they thought He would? Rahab lied and she was right to do so, not because lying is good or a practice to follow but because she was aligned with God as she hid the spies and protected them from the soldiers and her faith in God determined her behavior, which meant lying.

Let's be clear on this. The Bible celebrates Rahab, the former prostitute. So did Joshua and the rest of Israel. Out of all the people ordered destroyed in Jericho by God, only Rahab and her family members were saved. Add to that this. Rahab married the father of Salmon. Do you know who he was? He was the father of Boaz who was in turn the grandfather of David. Rahab is one of only four women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ our Savior. **Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.** (Matthew 1: 5-6a NIV) It would seem that the Lord blessed and cherished the former prostitute. James the brother of Jesus had this to say about Rahab. **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?** (James 2: 25 NIV) James is talking about faith here but making it clear that faith is useless and just empty words if nothing you do reflects your faith. Rahab's faith led to her actually hiding the spies and giving them a strategy for escaping the king's soldiers rather than just thinking about it or talking about the value of it. The writer of Hebrews uses Rahab as an example of how true faith in Christ looks. **By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.** (Hebrews 11: 31 NIV) Faith is in fact the driving force that keeps you connected to God and His will.

It is Rahab's faith in God that stands out most about her. Whatever her shortcomings, whatever her past, Rahab believed God and put her hope in Him for her life and the lives of those she loved. Before you can love Christ, you must have faith in Him and here is the big idea. No matter what you face or how bad your circumstances, cling to your faith in Jesus as your Savior and do not let go of the hope that He will see you through what you face. Make this a week of faith. Each time you come up against it, declare out loud to Jesus, "I believe you will see me through this and I trust you." **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** (Hebrews 11: 1 NIV)