

Unexpected Faith in Unexpected Grace

- Today's sermon is going to take back to days in SS, or to Bible history lessons in Luth grade school, because today's OT lesson part of big story of children Israel entering Promised Land. One of most imp events in OT. So as begin sermon, what say have rapid-fire Bible history review (ready?):
- Egypt; cry for help; sends Moses & Aaron to Pharaoh; won't let them; 10 plagues; 10th is death firstborn; finally frees slaves; changes mind, chases to Red Sea; parts for Israelites; Egyptians pursue; closes waters overtop army, completely destroying it; Mt. Sinai; 10 Com; golden calf, many killed; next travel to border of Canaan (Promised Land); Moses' 12 spies; Josh & Caleb say can; 10 can't; so people rebel; God punishes by not allowing enter, forcing wander in wilderness 40 years; so 40 years go by; now Moses dead, Joshua leader; brings back to border of Canaan. (So far remember all?)
- That's where story picks up: at banks of Jordan, with Josh in charge. **Vs. 1a.** Their job, scout land. But there's where story takes strange twist. **Vs. 1b.** Okay, why God's soldiers staying in home of prostitute? Can tell you wasn't for usual reason. Fact is: these spies on secret mission; didn't want draw attention; so tried to keep low profile, in brothel, with no intention of breaking 6th Com.
- But when cover is blown and King of Jericho questions Rahab (where foreigners), what she do? Something unexpected; protects, hides. **Vs. 6.** Like Underground Railroad during Civil War (ran through Burlington), people hid slaves to protect; what Rahab does here; keeps them safe on her roof.
- Question is: why? Why do that? These Israelite spies are foreign invaders intent on killing countrymen, capturing homeland. Besides that, if King Jericho were to find out she aiding in espionage, put to death for sure. Really risks her neck to save spies. Why? Reason why: you'd never expect. **Vs. 9-11.** Confession of faith you'd never expect! Rahab had begun to put her faith in Lord. Everyone else terrified of Lord. That's what you would expect. They'd heard re plagues, Red Sea, conquests – expect to be afraid. God had even promised in Dt, **“This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you” (2:25).** But in Rahab we see unexpected faith. We see Gentile, Canaanite woman confronted with reality that her gods false gods; that Lord of Israel is (as she says) **vs. 11b**; and that her salvation from her wicked way of life (by way, I'm sure she had guilty conscience about being prostitute) could come only from Israel's God. So, HS (who isn't mentioned here by name, but def at work) works unexpected faith in heart of Rahab.
- You know anyone who is Christian today, but never would've expected them to come to faith? I love stories: from foreign missionaries working with people in Pakistan, India, never heard anything re Jesus, but become strong Christians; from home mission pastors out west in Utah, working with burned out Mormons who've heard re Jesus but never understand grace, love; from teachers in Luth elem schools with kids from community in classroom asking 'Why Jesus die,' whole class saying, 'to pay for sins!' I love hearing stories like that: about unbelievers coming to faith when you'd least expect it. Know anyone with story like that? Or that story your story? Actually, it's all our story. Even if you raised in Christian household where faith would not be that unexpected, you still were born with sinful nature, still needed by converted from unbelief to faith. You were just as unlikely a candidate for Christianity as Rahab of Jericho; but just like he did for her, the HS also for you changed your heart. In waters of Holy Bap, or in pure preaching of God's word, whether child or adult, HS changed your heart from terror to trust in God. Worked in you, me unexpected faith.
- That unexpected faith holds onto unexpected grace (UG). Rahab shown UG. Grace = God's undeserved gifts to his people. God invites us pray him, ask for those gifts. I'm sure Rahab was praying to Lord for deliverance from Jericho's immanent destruction – even as she also asked for help from spies. **Vs. 12-13.** They agree; together come up with plan where she would drape this scarlet cord from window; when Israelites attack, capture Jericho, she and whole family spared. So that's what she did; **vs. 21c.** And that's how today's reading ends.

- Much more to story. Ready for more rapid-fire Bible history review? Spies make back to Israelite camp; whole community marches to banks of Jordan; when priests carrying ark of covenant step foot in river the waters part (like Rea Sea); pass through; camp near Jericho; Lord instructs Joshua to march around city with army once/day for 6 days; then on 7th day 7x, blow trumpets, walls will fall. By now prob ready to sing *'Joshua fought battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down.'* Just what did; just what happened. But wait, what ever happened to Rahab? Joshua 6, **“Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho – and she lives among the Israelites to this day” (6:25)**. God showed Rahab UG. And there’s more: Rahab ended up marrying man from Judah named Salmon; together raised a family, had descendant named Boaz; Boaz married Ruth from story of Ruth; their grandson was Jesse, father of King David; from line of David comes Jesus. So that means: Rahab prostitute from Jericho was (great)-grandmother of Jesus. That’s unexpected grace (UG)! So not only did God bless her with faith, spare her life, spare her family, give her 2nd chance at life with faithful husband, godly children, she became ancestress to Savior. That’s UG!
- And when we look at our lives, see all the amazing ways God blesses us (“Richly and daily provides clothing/shoes, food/drink, prop/home, spouse/children, land/cattle...”), and how also forgives our sins, promises us eternal life – I look at all this, I thank God for his UG.
- Rahab certainly was thankful. She experienced a complete 180 in faith and life. She had unexpected faith in God’s unexpected grace. And NT remembers her for it. In Heb 11, long list of heroes of faith, **“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient” (11:25)**. And in James, **“In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies” (2:25)**. She has this legacy in Scripture. But really for us the legacy is the lesson: don’t ever think anybody out there beyond saving. God changes hearts and lives for people of all walks of life, in all circumstances of life. So don’t write anyone off. And don’t forget that by nature you were no diff than Rahab was: just as sinful, just as helpless. When we stand in awe of God’s grace toward Rahab, and when we draw comparison between her and us, then we will learn to appreciate and thank God for our unexpected faith in God’s unexpected grace.

Joshua 2:1-21

¹ 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. ² The king of Jericho was told, “Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” ³ 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.”

⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.” ⁶ (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) ⁷ 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.

⁸ Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.

¹² “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 ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ “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.” ¹⁵ So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. ¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ Now the men had said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.” ²¹ “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.