

From Prostitute to Princess

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[0 : 0 0] the Bible passage today if I'm on is Joshua chapter 2 verses 1 to 24 and it's on page 216 of the Bible which should be sitting in the seat in front of you so Joshua chapter 2 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 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 stalks of flax that 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 laid down for the night she went up to 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 sank 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 are shorter 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 that the pursuers will not find you hide yourselves there for 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 the 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 them

everything that has happened to them they said to droshua the lord has surely given us the whole land to our hands all the people are melting in fear because of us thank you rosie and let me add my welcome to simon's uh to you this evening um joshua chapter two what great chapter the story of rahab well touchstone pictures released a film back in 1990 quite a long time ago now well before some of you were born that would become a blockbuster hit and would launch its debuting actress to superstardom this is not an endorsement from the pulpit i'm not going to recommend that you rush home and see it that wouldn't be a helpful outcome for this evening but in 1990 the film pretty woman was launched and it was a contemporary retelling of the cinderella fairy tale a rags to riches tale with julia roberts playing the part of the prostitute vivian and richard gear playing an entrepreneurial prince who falls in love with her well if you've not seen it you can probably guess how that pans out our passage this evening in joshua 2 is a real life account of a gentile prostitute called rahab and for sure this is no hollywood fantasy but as we shall see the story of rahab is more extraordinary by far with a fairy tale ending that's all the better because it's not a fairy tale it's real so let's pray as we come to the passage and ask god for his help father help us to see the amazing grace that you extend to those who trust in you no matter who we are or what our backstory is give us attentive ears and speak to us by your spirit for we ask it in jesus name amen well part of what it means to be god's people is that we're part of a bigger story and the book of joshua is part of that bigger story and central to the theme of the book of joshua is the truth that god is a promise keeper so hundreds of years before these events recorded in joshua the lord had pledged to abraham that to your offspring the lord said i will give you this land this land referring to the promised land of canaan that the people of israel were now just on the cusp of entering having spent some 40 years wandering through the desert wilderness this theme of the fulfillment of god's promises in relation to the land is central to the book of joshua in fact it is bookended with it so just glance across to the beginning of chapter one chapter one verses two to three now then says the lord you and all these people get ready to cross the river jordan into the land i'm about to give them and then right at the end of the book joshua is able to declare to the leaders

you know that every promise has been fulfilled not one has failed the truth that god fulfills his promise of land has big implications for us today those who belong to god's people those who are redeemed by the blood of christ for we will one day inherit a land an inheritance which the apostle peter describes as imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for us so we have god's promise of a glorious eternal land and like israel we shall receive this inheritance because ours is a god who keeps his promises the other thing to say by way of introduction is that not only is this a big transition from desert to the promised land but it's a big transition of leadership here at the start of joshua from mooses to joshua at the jordan river involving joshua leading the people through a body of water just as mooses before him led the people of israel in the exodus through a body of water it'd be hard to overestimate the monumental significance of this moment in israel's history a new era's uh dawning and the promised land is finally within grasp the horizon is literally filled with promise and a sweet uh warm breeze carrying with its sweet fragrant fragrant smells wafting across the water the produce of its landscape and this is where we left it last week at the end of chapter one then we have chapter two which as far as the main plot line is concerned uh is totally unnecessary for the narrative you could go straight from the end of chapter one straight into chapter three seamlessly so what we need to be asking ourselves as we come to joshua chapter chapter two is what is this doing here in our bibles let me plant the seeds of a thought it is amazing that we are introduced to this character of rahab a woman who in the israelites eyes should be excluded doubly excluded from the scope of god's grace not only is she a canaanite but she's also a prostitute now i don't pretend to know the details of your circumstances of everyone here tonight but if there's anyone here tonight who feels that they're beyond the scope of god's grace who feels like they're a hopeless case beyond a pill well please know that there's nothing in your brokenness that prevents you from receiving the grace of god's love god really does love you and he's a god who delights to amaze us with his grace in the most unexpected ways and unlikely of circumstances the story of rahab the prostitute is testament to that fact so we're going to be considering uh... this evening under two headings before spending a little bit of time just drawing some conclusions together at the end so firstly god's men seek refuge with rahab the prostitute so read along with me again in chapter two verse one

then joshua sent two spies from shittim to go to jericho and spy out the land so with the words of the lord uh... from last week reverberating in their ears be strong and courageous joshua sends out the two men on their secret reconnaissance mission now straight away the fact that there are two spies would be ringing a bell with those first readers of joshua because some 40 years earlier a similar group of spies were sent out on a mission 12 spies in this case and it was a disaster 10 of them had returned in a spirit of pessimism afraid and dismayed instead of strong and courageous and only two of them had returned with commendable faith and that's basically the reason why this uh... people of god have been wandering around in the desert for the past 40 years because of their lack of faith and joshua would have been acutely aware of the failure of these 12 spies because he had been one of them in fact he was one of the two good spies along with caleb so here we are at the beginning of joshua chapter 2 and joshua ditches the other 10 and just goes with the two spies there's a whole lot resting on the shoulders of these two and it would have been ample time for them to reflect on the the challenge that they had as they trekked the 15 kilometers or so from the israelite camp of shittim to jericho and jericho must have loomed large on the horizon the fortified citadel must have been an impressive sight to these uh... nomadic people but they managed to gain entry into the city's interior didn't they without being stopped and we're not told how far they'd got or how far they'd wandered through the narrow streets before they took refuge in the house of a prostitute named rahab at this point it sounds a little bit dodgy doesn't it what kind of uh... spies are these sounds like they've been maybe watching uh... too many james bond movies or something like that and taking lessons from 007 in spying however there's no suggestion in our passage that there's anything untowards going on the whole point of being a spy is to uh... try and go unnoticed and there's been reports in the news recently of british special forces in the ukraine and their main task is to be unnoticed as they gather intelligence so these spies are not marching into jericho advertising the fact that they're spies and they're looking for somewhere where they're not going to be attracting attention as foreigners and uh...

they maybe thought that the house of a prostitute was as good a place as any well as it turns out though it doesn't take long for them to be sussed out and you can just imagine the the buzz and the commotion in the citadel as word gets back to the king of jericho that there's a pair of undercover agents at large within the city confines and last seen going into the house of rahab the prostitute so now there's a real and present danger and there's a loud knock on the door rahab bring out the men but rahab had hidden the men from the king of jericho in verse 4 notice that this is at great risk to herself the lord had commanded his people in chapter 1 to be strong and courageous well here we have the first example of someone being strong and courageous and it's from the courage of a brave woman the canaanite prostitute and she'd hidden the men upstairs on her roof and concealed their location by sending the search party on this wild goose chase she'd open the door and then with great composure she says yes the men came to me but I didn't know where they'd come from and before they'd left they left before the gate closed and I don't know which way they went so Rahab deceived them and at this point we sometimes find folk that get a bit het up with this and criticize

[16 : 56] Rahab for breaking the commandment not to lie but what Rahab's doing here isn't anything that the spies aren't already doing she's deceiving the men of Jericho in what she says and the spies are attempting to deceive them by their secretive action so both Rahab and the spies in being loyal to the Lord necessarily means that they're being disloyal to the king of Jericho and so Rahab is simply allying herself with God and his people and indeed the New Testament book of James affirms her righteousness in hiding these spies and this let me emphasize was at great risk to Rahab if they'd heard a sneeze or a cough if they'd gone up on the roof to do a thorough search she'd be dead so she risks her life for these men and where we left then on tenuous hooks with the men up on the roof and the search party gone for now but the city gate was shut verse 7 so how would the spies escape now we have to wait all the way down to verse 15 to find out that Rahab would lure them by rope through her window taking advantage of the position of her house on the perimeter wall and we're left deliberately in suspense because there's a bigger question to answer that is why on earth did Rahab the prostitute risk her life for these two foreign spies what did she have to gain and so this leads us on to our next section that Rahab the prostitute seeks refuge with God's men so with the immediate threat to the spies averted

Rahab goes up to them on the roof and we're back in verse 8 and following there and here follows the most extraordinary confession from Rahab I know she says in verse 9 I know that the Lord has given you this land and a great fear of you has fallen on us it's a dispiriting fear in verse 11 that she says has swept across her people and there's more she rehearses before them their own national history of God's miraculous deeds in freeing his people from Egyptian slavery and their victories over the Amorite kings devoting them to destruction and she's really just building up to a crescendo because now comes her absolutely stunning declaration of faith at the end of verse 11 for the Lord your God he is God in the heavens above and the earth below this is a staggering confession from a Canaanite since it's almost word for word what the Israelites themselves were commanded to say and so compare these words from Deuteronomy with Rahab's confession know therefore today and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath there is no other what a remarkable confession of faith from Rahab

Rahab affirms that the one true God of all creation is the God of Israel she attests to his mighty saving acts on behalf of his people she asserts her conviction that he'll fulfill his promise and this is even more remarkable still because she hopes against hope and seeks the mercy of this same God of Israel and so she says to the spies in verse 12 now then please swear to me by the Lord that you will spare the lives of me and my father's household and save us from death so Rahab the Canaanite prostitute seeks mercy from the God of Israel and here we have the evidence of her genuine faith in the Lord faith in his personal saving grace and hope that this should be extended to her even to her the writer Dale Ralph Davis who's written a great little commentary on Joshua puts it like this genuine faith never rests content with being convinced of the reality of God but presses on to take refuge in God

Rahab not only must know the clear truth about God but also must escape the coming wrath of God God so in other words it isn't just a matter of correct belief but of desperate needs and while the same applies to us doesn't it it's not enough for us to affirm the sound teaching it's not enough for us to affirm good teaching we need to be convinced of our own desperate needs of salvation and then we can't be sure of this but I think there's possibly circumstantial evidence at least that points to further to her repentance and to the Lord's transformative work in her life did you notice the description of her dwelling is more like a tailor's shop than a knocking shop the flax being dried and prepared on the roof from which linen cloth would be woven the great lengths of rope and the scarlet cord these all point to a readily available stock of fabrics and fibers in other words there's at least the possibility of an alternative industry and income some hints perhaps of an attempt to turn away from her former profession but whatever the case may be we may be sure of this that

Rahab the pagan prostitute is seeking the mercy of God and just as she'd risked her own life in providing refuge for God's men so too do God's men pledge their own lives in promising refuge to Rahab and they provide her with the sure sign that she asks for in verses 12 to 13 in the scarlet cord which was to attach to her window she's supposed to hang a scarlet cord in the window of the house in the perimeter wall the same window from which the spies would make their escape and the scarlet cord is supposed to signify to the Israelite army that this house is under protection and this is where it gets really interesting because the significance of this sign is that it is in effect a Gentile Passover scarlet token on the window frame bearing more than a passing resemblance to the blood daubed doorposts of the

[24 : 48] Passover in Exodus 12 which in turn foreshadowed the red blood of Jesus whereby even the worst offenders can take refuge from God's coming judgments both the blood and the scarlet cord are called signs the scarlet cord and the blood and the doorjams both marking the households of those who'd be spared the judgment of the Lord and the command is given in both cases that no one is to leave the house or they'd be subject to God's wrath so God's judgment is about to pass through the land when Israel's army crosses the Jordan but Rahab's household will be spared because they take shelter under the blood red sign of this remarkable gentile Passover I'm going to make just a few comments in closing with regards to God's purposes in all this and how this applies to us tying up some loose threads as it were so the story of Rahab the prostitute and the two spies is really

God's story of the extraordinary grace that he shows in his people's lives consider first the spies was it not the Lord himself who preserved their lives by providing a hospitable refuge in an otherwise hostile environment three days in the hillsides brought them back from the grave figuratively speaking to bring the good news of certain victory back to Joshua Israel and then consider Rahab God's people were about to take possession of the land something that they had been waiting literally centuries for but now they have to wait a few more days because there was one of God's own in that citadel a lost sheep that dwelt within the city walls a precious soul belonging to the

Lord a prostitute who would become a princess the Hollywood version ends something like this pretty woman ends like this with a yuppie knight in a shining white limousine whisking away the Cinderella coal girl into the sunset but Rahab's story is far more satisfying than that her incredible faith in the Lord is rewarded more than she could have possibly imagined or dreamt or dared even to believe firstly I'm skipping ahead here to give us a teaser from chapter six but firstly God heard her plea for mercy and she did not perish when Jericho was raised to the ground God preserved her life and those dear to her secondly she was incorporated into the community of God's people she dwelt among them all her days and thirdly and best of all there is a real life fairy tale ending for

Rahab she became the honoured wife of Salmon who is described in the Bible as a prince of Judah so she literally went from being a prostitute to being a Jewish princess Rahab was the mother of Boaz and married Ruth this former prostitute was therefore an ancestor of King David the line of her descendants becoming the royal Davidic line and this former prostitute is believe it or not therefore ancestor to our Lord Jesus Christ even appearing in Matthew's genealogy unimaginable honour for this former pagan prostitute Rahab a story of a life transformed and turned around her life a trophy of sheer grace for the God who takes the unravelled threads of our lives and weaves them into something beautiful for his glory so please don't sit there thinking that you are beyond the reach of God's love don't delay but run into his loving arms and take shelter there in his amazing grace let's pray before we turn to worship again heavenly father before your grace intervened our lives were a mess rahab might have been a prostitute on the outside but we were prostitutes on the inside spiritual prostitutes with misplaced affections we thank you for our lord jesus christ our passover lamb who didn't just risk his life but gave it up for us his blood is not a pledge but a payment in full for our debt of sin please lord continue your spirit's work of transforming our brokenness and making us into something beautiful for the glory of christ in his name we pray amen so you