

Is God Black and White?

I Samuel 16:1-13

Sermon

Hobart, April 14th, 2013

Devonport, April 27th, 2013

Launceston, April 28th, 2013

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I. OLD TESTAMENT READING:

Joshua 2:

Rahab Protects the Spies

2 Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove.* He instructed them, “Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.” So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.

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⁴ Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, “Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn’t know where they were from.”⁵ They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don’t know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them.”⁶ (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.)⁷ So the king’s men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king’s men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.

⁸ Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them.⁹ “I know the LORD has given you this land,” she told them. “We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror.”¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed.*¹¹ No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.

¹² “Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that¹³ when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families.”

¹⁴ “We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety,” the men agreed. “If you don’t betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the LORD gives us the land.”¹

* Hebrew *Shittim*.

* The Hebrew term used here refers to the complete consecration of things or people to the LORD, either by destroying them or by giving them as an offering.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jos 1:10-2:24). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

II. NEW TESTAMENT READING

Hebrews 11:31-40

³¹ It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

³² How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. ³³ By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their loved ones back again from death.

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. ³⁶ Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. ³⁷ Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, * and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. ³⁸ They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. ⁴⁰ For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us. ²

* Some manuscripts add *some were tested*.

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INTRODUCTION:

A. IT WILL SOON BE MOTHERS DAY

1. A time to honour the mother's in our families, church and society, as well as the role all women play making our lives and world a better place
2. The Bible is full of female heroes
 - a) Some of them are exemplary in just about every way. Particularly Mary, the mother of Jesus who we talked about a few months ago
 - b) Later in the year, Bill is planning to give a sermon on another heroine, Esther
3. But like their male counterparts, many of the starring women of Scripture had their flaws and weaknesses
 - a) Including the woman we are going to look at today

S.P.S:

B. HER STORY IS PARTICULARLY INSIGHTFUL REGARDING THE QUESTION WE ASKED LAST TIME

1. Is God black and white in his actions and judgments?
2. Are we to view the world from a black and white perspective, with no compromise or equivocation about what is right and wrong?
3. Do the Scriptures give us unequivocal, dogmatic, true in all circumstances answers and instructions, telling us what to do in our lives?
4. Is life and righteousness so straightforward that we can live by black and white rules that hold irrevocably and without compromise in any and every situation?
 - a) Is righteousness in God's sight, just a matter of reading and obeying?

C. TODAY

- a) Today we are going to take some time to look at Rahab
- b) And consider how a famous incident in her life provokes us to think a bit more broadly, and hopefully wisely, about our topic

D. PRAYER

BODY:

III. FIRST LET'S START BY LOOKING AT HOW THE NT REGARDS RAHAB

A. HEBREWS 11:

- 1. This is the most well known reference to Rahab, and it she is held up as an exemplary hero.

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2. There were many others that could have been included, so why pick Rahab?

B. THE SAME QUESTION CAN BE ASKED ABOUT HER INCLUSION IN JESUS' HUMAN GENEALOGY

Matthew 1:1-6 *The Ancestors of Jesus the Messiah*

1 This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David* and of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Ram.*

⁴ Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶ Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

C. THERE WERE MANY OTHER MOTHERS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN INCLUDED, SO WHY PICK RAHAB?

1. And for that matter why pick on Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba?

* Greek *Jesus the Messiah, son of David*.

* Greek *Aram*, a variant spelling of Ram; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10.

a) None of them are “pure” in the sense that the Jews and the law would define pure and clean individuals.

2. The Bible Knowledge Commentary discusses why Matthew included these women, when so many others are missed in this list;

Another interesting fact about Matthew’s genealogy is the inclusion of four Old Testament women: **Tamar** (Matt. 1:3), **Rahab** (v. 5), **Ruth** (v. 5), and Solomon’s **mother** (v. 6), Bathsheba. All of these women (as well as most of the men) were questionable in some way. Tamar and Rahab were prostitutes (Gen. 38:24; Josh. 2:1), Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess (Ruth 1:4), and Bathsheba committed adultery (2 Sam. 11:2-5).

Matthew may have included these women in order to emphasize that God’s choices in dealing with people are all of His grace. Perhaps also he included these women in order to put Jewish pride in its place.³

IV. RAHAB

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v. verse

³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (18). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

* Hebrew *Shittim*.

the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king's men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.

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¹⁴ "We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety," the men agreed. "If you don't betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the LORD gives us the land."

A. GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. What did Rahab do to save the spies?
2. How many lies did she tell?

B. GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Why do you think Rahab is upheld as a hero?
2. Should she have lied to and deliberately deceived the king and the soldiers of her own people?

C. REPORT:

1. Note; To claim, as many of us have done, that she should not have lied, that she should have found another way to save the spies, is frankly, unfair and unrealistic.

* The Hebrew term used here refers to the complete consecration of things or people to the LORD, either by destroying them or by giving them as an offering.

a) How can a person under such danger and stress—with concerns not only for herself, but her family—be expected to come up with a wiser than Solomon type solution in a split second?

(1) It is legalistic, naïve, and contrary to the approach Jesus took to our weaknesses and imperfections.

b) The point is that Rahab did the very best she could as a frightened, vulnerable human being. But more importantly that she ultimately acted in faith.

(1) Rather than doing nothing, she actively trusted in God.

(2) In doing so putting her neck on the line to protect God's people who were doing his kingdom work at the time.

V. WHAT IS IMPORTANT?

A. BACK TO HEBREWS

1. The author is exhorting the people because of the tough and evil times that they were facing

2. But what was he focusing on as of prime importance for them?

a) Start back in

Hebrews 10:32

³² Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ.* Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. ³⁴ You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.

³⁵ So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! ³⁶ Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.

* Greek *when you were first enlightened*.

B. WHAT BRINGS GREAT REWARD? (V35-36)

1. Not keeping moral or religious laws or observing days or diets
2. Not keeping a list of commandments
3. Not keeping separate from our neighbours and our society
4. Not outward religious works
5. But faith;
 - a) Believing, trusting, relying on God rather than ourselves and our own righteousness
 - b) Trusting in Jesus to be our saviour and our Lord and friend
 - (1) Our helper, and guide and strength in our lives in the here and now
 - c) And trusting on him to come again and resurrect us and restore our lives and our world

³⁷ “For in just a little while,

the Coming One will come and not delay.

³⁸ And my righteous ones will live by faith.*

But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away.”*

³⁹ But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.

6. “Unfaith”, unfaithfulness, is sin

- a) Sin is turning away from God, separating ourselves and relying on ourselves or other God substitutes, such as material things, and especially our own religious efforts such as rule keeping
- b) These are all forms of idolatry, looking to other sources for our life and salvation

* Or *my righteous ones will live by their faithfulness*; Greek reads *my righteous one will live by faith*.

* Hab 2:3-4.

c) Substituting any other rule or guide in the place of Jesus and the Holy Spirit

7. Chapter 11 then goes on to give examples of people who put their trust in God rather than other alternatives

Great Examples of Faith

11 Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. ²Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

C. OPEN DISCUSSION:

1. Why is Rahab held up as an exemplary woman of faith who earned a good reputation?
 2. What did she do that bore witness that she was a woman of exemplary faith?
 3. How is her lie actually part of her act of faith?
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VI. LESSONS:

A. HOW DOES RAHAB'S STORY HELP US WITH OUR QUESTION; "IS GOD BLACK AND WHITE?"

1. How does it help us answer the related question;
 - a) "If something is wrong, is it wrong in each and every circumstance...?"
2. In Rahab's case, was her lying a sin?
 - a) Or to the contrary, was it an act of righteousness?
 - b) An act of faith?
 - (1) An expression of her reverence and honoring of the true God of Israel?
 - (2) An act in which she put herself and her welfare second to that of God's servants, and God's work of saving his people, and bringing them into the land of the promise

B. IT IS EASY TO PICK OUT THE SCRIPTURES THAT POINT OUT SINFUL BEHAVIOURS

1. And act as if faith and righteousness is all about keeping moral standards and rules
2. That was the immovable and vociferous stance of the Jewish rulers and teachers

C. BUT JESUS CONTINUALLY TAUGHT AND DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE IS MORE TO GOD THAN RULES AND LAWS

1. The beatitudes are just one place where he showed laws and rules are totally inadequate to reveal God and his way of life
2. Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and forgiving of the woman taken in adultery tell a much larger and more complex story
3. He said that life, and in particular, mercy, faith and love come before laws and religious rules and particularly before condemning and shunning those who break those rules and laws
4. He pointed out that the religious rulers looked white and righteous on the outside, but inside they were dead and corrupt
5. On the other hand, he included those who were viewed as "sinners", as religiously unclean, and outside the camp among his disciples and closest followers
 - a) Matthew was a tax collector
 - b) Many were fisherman
 - c) And what about one of his closest female helpers, Mary Magdalene?
 - (1) She is mentioned 11 times in the gospels, more than most of the apostles
 - (2) But she was healed of seven demons, and tradition believes that she was formerly a prostitute

- (3) But she was one of the few that stood by Jesus right to the cross
- (4) And Mark and John tell us she was the first Jesus appeared to after his resurrection

D. AND LET US NOT FORGET WHAT WE OBSERVED IN MATTHEW'S RECORD OF JESUS' GENEALOGY

CONCLUSION:

I. SO IS GOD BLACK AND WHITE?

A. CAN HIS WAYS, HIS MIND, HIS WILL, HIS RIGHTEOUS LIFE OF LOVE BE SUMMED UP IN SIMPLISTIC BLACK AND WHITE STATEMENTS AND LAWS?

1. What we have looked at today is controversial, and confronting
2. The Scriptures give us much broader picture than many assume
 - a) They are inspired to do like Jesus, the living Word, did in his ministry
 - b) To provoke us to think, to get our attention, to help us listen, to help us grow in maturity and wisdom
 - c) To see more and more the depth and breadth of the heart and mind of God
3. They help us see that he is not a God of black and white, simplistic one rule and size fits all, in all circumstances
 - a) He isn't trying to get us to conform to a set of outward rules and standards
 - b) He sent his Son and his Spirit to live with us and in us
 - (1) To change us from the inside
 - (2) To transform our hearts and minds, our inner self, our nature

B. GOD IS LOVE

1. His priorities are relationships
2. Rahab trusted God, and she put her life and her relatives in danger out of reverence and love for him
3. Love, faith and relationships are what all the laws and black and white rules were there to teach
 - a) But they too often get turned into little gods and become idols, and used and misused taking people away from God instead of towards him
 - b) Having people so het up about the rules, the gnats, as Jesus termed them, that they swallow a camel
 - c) They end up going against God and his way of loving relationships, in the name of their precious rules and moral standards

C. AS WE FOCUS ON AT PENTECOST,

1. we are given God's spirit to lead us to grown in the maturity and wisdom of Jesus Christ
2. To see and understand God and the world we live, and the situations we face, more and more through Jesus' eyes
3. This is an ongoing process
 - a) It is based on our living our lives, with the Holy Spirit living alongside us, showing us more of the truth and realities of each aspect of life, each situation
 - b) Helping us to know our God and share in the life and wisdom and faith of his Son more and more each day

D. PRAYER
