

## UNLIKELY HEROES (Joshua 2:1-24)

He was born and raised in a small Texas town. He was the 7<sup>th</sup> of 11 children. His parents were sharecroppers. His dad abandoned the family when he was young; so, he dropped out of school in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade to help support the family. He made \$1 a day picking cotton. His mother died when he was 15. At the age of 16, after Pearl Harbor was bombed, he tried to get into the military. The Army, the Navy, and the Marines all rejected him because he was too young and too underweight. When he was 17, he had his older sister falsify an affidavit that stated he was 18. He ate to gain weight prior to the physical, and the Army accepted him. According to their records, he stood “5, ’5 and ½, and weighed 112 pounds.

After basic training, his commanding officer wanted to make him a cook believing he was too small to serve in the infantry, but he was resolute in wanting to be a foot soldier. In time, he was sent overseas, where he saw plenty of action in both Italy and France.

He went in as a private, but before the war ended, he received a rare battlefield commission to Second Lieutenant and platoon leader. In addition to winning the Medal of Honor, he was awarded 36 other medals making him the most decorated soldier of World War II. He was a true, American hero.

After the war, he went to Hollywood and starred in numerous movies. He appeared in 44 feature films, one of which was a film adaptation of his memoirs concerning his military service. It was entitled *To Hell and Back*.

Audie Murphy was not just a hero; he was an unlikely hero. This short, sleight, teenage man-child was awarded every medal of valor America offers and several from other countries for his heroic actions on the field of battle.

Unlikely heroes. The Bible is full of them. Moses, although he had Jewish parents, grew up in the court of the Pharaoh and was raised as the grandson of the leader of Egypt. At age 40, he fled Egypt because he had killed an Egyptian. At age 80, God sent him back to Egypt and used him to free the children of Israel from their long and cruel captivity in Egypt. He was an unlikely hero.

David was just a gangly youth. He had been sent by his father to bring provisions to his older brothers who were in the army. Through an odd series of events, God used David to cut the giant Goliath down to size, and in doing so, he inspired the cowardly army of Israel to win a great victory. He was an unlikely hero.

The NT character Saul was ravaging the infant church, jailing Christians, and approving of their deaths. God stopped him in his tracks, turned him around, and appointed him as an apostle to the Gentiles. We owe much of what we know about Christian theology to Saul, who was renamed Paul. He was an unlikely hero.

Today, we will examine an unlikely hero, actually a heroine. She was unlikely for several reasons—she was a female; she was a Gentile, and she was a prostitute. Her name was Rahab. We find her story in Joshua 2.

I believe God wants you and me to live heroic lives. There is much we can learn from Rahab. I want you to notice four truths about unlikely heroes as we go through Joshua 2.

## Unlikely Heroes Are Drawn to Faith in God by God

Rahab came to believe in the God of the Hebrews. I was surprised to discover that Rahab came to faith much the same way you, and I, and everybody else come to faith. She ended up believing in God because of what she heard.

Let's rehearse the story. It is time for the Israelites to go into the land God had promised them and to take it from those who were living there. Before doing so, Joshua sends two spies into the land to get a closer look, especially of Jericho.

You will remember that Joshua had been one of the original spies who had gone into the land a little less than 40 years ago. God had told Moses to send 12 spies into the land. After returning, only Caleb and Joshua encouraged the people to go into the land and take it. The other 10 said, "No, we can't succeed. There are giants in the land. We are like grasshoppers in their sight." The people ignored the two and heeded the counsel of the 10. They disobeyed God's clear directive, and as a result, they were made to wander until all the adults of that generation had died off. Only Joshua, Caleb, and those who were less than 20 at the time the people rebelled remained.

Remembering the cowardice and unfaithfulness of the ten, I am sure that Joshua was extremely careful when choosing the two spies. I imagine he sent two rather than 12 to make them less noticeable.

The authorities in Jericho would have known that the Israelites were camped beyond the Jordan, and they likely kept a lookout for any strangers who might be wandering about. Those two Hebrews were as easily spotted as two American tourists in Europe. They might as well have been wearing a fanny pack around their waist and a camera around their neck. It didn't take much to realize these guys aren't from around here. They spies weren't apprehended, but they were followed.

God providentially directed them to the home of a prostitute. They weren't there to use her services. They were there because unbeknownst to them, God had been working in her heart, and she could be of help to them.

Due to her line of work, I am sure she was used to having travelers make their way to her home. Travelers then and now like to talk about what they have seen and what they have heard. Undoubtedly, Rahab had clients who told her about how the Egyptians let the Israelites go after a series of plagues had ravaged their country. She would have been told of how the Jews crossed the Red Sea miraculously. She would have learned of how the Israelites had defeated the Amorite forces of King Sihon and Og, and how they had taken that land for themselves east of the Jordan.

For Rahab, this wasn't just idle banter.

You and I can't imagine a foreign army camped just on the other side of I-35, straight east of here. Instead, think of living in Israel today with the forces of Hamas south of you, north of you, and Palestinians also living east of you, and some living amongst you.

Look at vv. 11-12. Rahab took what she had heard to heart. She thought about it. She contemplated it, and she concluded that the God of the Israelites was real and that He is the true God of heaven and earth.

Rahab came to faith in God the same way we come—by what we hear. Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, “Faith comes by hearing.” More specifically, it comes by hearing the word of God. The KJV of the Bible translates 1 Corinthians 1:21 this way: “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

Think about it. A preacher or an evangelist gets up and preaches for 30-40 minutes. People listen. They are convicted of their sin, and they place their faith in Jesus. Their lives are forever changed not by reading a textbook, not by taking a class, or not by watching a movie. Their lives are transformed because a man got up, read the word of God, and told them what God was saying to them.

Scripture tells us that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. In the work of salvation, God takes the message preached, and the Holy Spirit uses it to draw that person to faith in Jesus. Jesus taught, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44).

I don’t believe Rahab came to believe in the God of the Israelites by her reasoning ability alone. I think God was drawing her to Himself.

That should be our prayer for our Christian friends, neighbors, and family members: “Dear God, draw them to faith in Jesus.” But then, in addition to praying for them, they need to hear the message of God’s word; so, invite them to a place where they can hear that message.” Invite them, but do more than that. Pick them up, bring them, and sit with them.

Notice also . . .

### **Unlikely Heroes Are Not Disqualified by Their Past**

One reason we know the Bible is true is that it is honest about the sins of its heroes. The Bible does not whitewash, cover up, or ignore the failings of its major characters.

- Noah got drunk.
- Abraham repeatedly passed his wife off as his sister because of fear.
- Jacob was a cheat.
- Judah had sex with who he thought was a prostitute but later learned was his daughter-in-law.
- Moses was a murderer.
- David was an adulterer, as well as a murderer.
- Jonah tried to run from God’s call.
- The disciples were cowards.
- Peter betrayed Jesus.
- Thomas doubted Jesus had truly been raised.

And that is just a short list. None of those sins kept God from using those individuals to accomplish His purposes.

Listen to what we read in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

<sup>9</sup>Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Never forget that God's grace is bigger than your sin. He will take you as you are and make you what He wants you to be, and He wants you to be like Jesus. It is not your job to remake yourself. Your job is to be the lump of clay that allows the Great Potter to shape you as He wishes. Don't resist Him. Be pliable in His hands. Be moldable.

Sometimes people are known by their sin and identified with their sin long after they have repented of that sin. For instance, God renamed Jacob as Israel, but we still refer to him as Jacob. The name Jacob basically meant "trickster." Eventually, Jacob outgrew that character flaw, but he is still known as Jacob. We refer to Naaman as Naaman the Leper. Well, he was healed of his leprosy, but we act like he remained a leper. We identify David with his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, but that only happened once, and David repented of his sin. We call Thomas, Doubting Thomas, but he didn't remain in doubt. He embraced Jesus as his Lord and God. The OT character Rahab is even referred to in the NT as Rahab the prostitute. She didn't remain one. She gave up that life, but she didn't fully escape her reputation.

Robin Roberts, the former anchorwoman for ABC's Good Morning America is a breast cancer survivor. She underwent a bone marrow transplant that helped her to beat cancer. Her mother died before she won her battle against cancer, but Robin Robert's mother gave her wise counsel. To her daughter, she said, "Robin, cancer has made a mess of your life but make your mess your message."

I don't know what mess you have had to deal with, but I do know that we all have our own mess. I also know that God can help you make your message your message. God does not permit your past to disqualify you from His love, and it does not disqualify you from serving Him with the gifts He has given you.

### **Unlikely Heroes Display Their Faith by What They Do**

Rahab's faith in the God of the Israelites impelled her to risk her own life. Her faith was expressed by what she did. This former prostitute was enshrined in what we call the Hall of Faith, that famous 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews. We read in Hebrews 11:31, "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies."

Rahab gave the two Hebrew spies lodging for the night. She rightly suspected they might be in danger. She hid them. Then, when she was called to appear before the king, she was questioned about the men. She said, "I didn't know who they were, and they left at night just before the city gate was closed." She sent authorities on a wild, good chase.

Some have faulted her for lying. The Bible doesn't do that; so, neither will I. She did what she felt she had to do to protect men whose God she believed was the true God. I

believe what she did was not sinful; rather, it was prompted by faith. We read in James 2:25, “Was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”

Some have tried to say that Paul and James disagreed in their theology. Paul taught we are justified by faith alone, and it seems that James is teaching we are justified by works. In my view, the writings of Paul and James are not contradictory; they are complementary. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. Saving faith empowers and impels us to do something with our faith. Our works reveal that we do have faith. If your supposed faith never causes you to serve God in some way, you would have cause to question the legitimacy and authenticity of your faith.

She was born about 100 years before Audie Murphy, but she, too, was a true, American hero or heroine. Her name was Harriet Tubman. She was born as a slave in Maryland. In 1849 she escaped to Philadelphia and to freedom. Then, in 1850 she returned to Maryland to guide her sister and two nieces to freedom, and then other relatives (including her aged parents). It is believed that she had made 19 journeys in and out of Maryland leading as many as 300 slaves to freedom using the underground railroad, a series of safehouses and hideouts.

She once told an audience, “I was conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can’t say – I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

During the Civil War, Harriet Tubman served both as a nurse and a northern spy and scout. She secured military information from blacks behind Confederate lines.

Tubman has been called “the Moses of her people.” She was a deeply religious woman who never doubted that her actions were guided by God through visions and dreams.

Like Rahab, she showed her faith by what she did, and she risked her life to do so. What are you doing as an expression of your faith?

### **Unlikely Heroes Are Delivered Like We All Are**

I want us to take special note of vv. 18 and 21.

Dr. Robert Smith, Jr. is a preaching professor at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, AL. In a sermon on this second chapter of Joshua, he said:

This passage forces us to look back at the Passover because this red scarlet cord is emblematic, it’s symbolic, it’s metaphorical of salvation. That’s really what happened down in Egypt. God sent an order and told Moses, “Tell the head of the tribes in every home to kill a lamb that’s blemishless, no broken bones. Smear the blood over the doorposts and lintels of the house. I’m coming by here tonight with a death angel and when the angel sees the blood he will pass over.” Now, he didn’t pass over because everybody in that house were ethically acceptable, morally impressive, but they were in the house. They were under the blood. It had nothing

to do with works at all. They were under the blood. What these spies say to Rahab is, “If you get your mother, father, sisters and brothers, and anyone else you bring, under this red scarlet cord, then we guarantee in the name of God you will be spared.” I keep trying to tell people it’s not by our works at all, it’s by his grace. It’s by his blood that we are saved.

On New Year’s Eve in 1961, Dr. W.A. Criswell, the pastor of the First Baptist of Dallas, preached a sermon that started somewhere between 7 and 7:30. He ended his message at some point in the New Year. It lasted between 4 and a half to five hours. Criswell entitled his sermon, “The Scarlet Thread.” He began his sermon in Genesis and ended it in Revelation. He traced the teaching of atoning sacrifice through the pages of Scripture. *To atone* means *to cover*. Our sins have been forever covered by the shed blood of Jesus. The scarlet thread of His redemptive work is surely woven throughout the fabric of the Old and New Testaments.

God does not have multiple plans of salvation. There is not plan of salvation for the Jews and a different plan of salvation for the Gentiles. There was not a plan of salvation for those who lived in the days of the OT and another plan of salvation for those who live after the coming of Jesus. Salvation was, is, and always will be by grace through faith. Jesus died on the cross and with His blood paid the price and bore the penalty of sin, all sin—the sin of those who lived before Him and the sin of all who lived after Him. When we place our faith in Him, we receive the forgiveness He offers and the righteousness He provides.

Rahab was not only delivered from certain death, she was also delivered to a new life. She became part of God’s family. She embarked on a new life. From Matthew’s gospel, we learn that she was a great, great grandmother to King David and thus a direct ancestor of Jesus.

If you will receive Jesus, He will deliver you from spiritual death and deliver you to a new life. He will receive you into His family, His forever family.

I urge you to make that eternity-altering and life-changing decision today. Turn from your sin and trust Jesus as your Savior and your Lord. Then, let that faith you have in God be expressed by what you do in service to Him.