

# Rahab's Kamikaze Faith Hangs by a Thread

## How Faith Trumps our Sins

### *Introduction*

This is week 8 of our sermon series – Kamikaze Hearts for God – How Faith and Action take us to the Edge. We have been on quite a journey so far – and by God's grace we have two more extremely important messages – in fact I believe the two most important messages of the series. Next week is Pentecost – and we will be looking at the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing God's people together into a community. This is an especially important subject for us during this time of transition.

We have looked at how faith trumps doubt and how faith trumps our fears. This week we look at how faith trumps our sins.

Let's Pray

A few weeks ago I mentioned that I was surprised at how tenacious sin is – how I thought when I first became a Christian – that after a period time, I would be walking so close to God that my life would be a wonderful model of godliness and holiness. Not perfect – but certainly better than I am now.

A few years back I was vacuuming the carpet of one of our old cars. I would vacuum it and then the carpet would look good – but then I would pound on it and up would come more dirt. I would vacuum that up – and pound away. Again more dirt. Over and over again. My mind told me that there had to be an end. Those of you who know my stubborn persistence to get to the bottom of things would have gotten a kick out of watching me. Vacuum – pound. Vacuum – pound. This has to end some time. There must be a finite amount of dirt here. Then God spoke to me and said –“This dirt in the carpet is like the sin in your life. You can make your life look pretty good and clean. But put some pressure on it – and the dirt that is buried deep within will come up.”

God is calling us to a future that is more than we can even imagine – But the seemingly endless nature of our sin can make us feel that we're disqualified – “God you could never use me” – “God you could never love me.” And of course the enemy gets into the mix – the whisper-er - “How can God love you when you – who know better – still fail him – still fall short – still do things out of fear rather than faith.”

In 1974 – just after the woolly mammoths left Connecticut - Barbara and I had the privilege of starting a ministry to young people – a phone counseling center that was connected to a very youth oriented radio program. Very quickly this ministry was reaching a number of young people every week. One day, a young woman came up to me and started telling about this incredible ministry she heard about. I responded: “I started that.” That evening – WPOP pulled the radio show and brought the ministry virtually to a halt.

For a number of years after that – I wondered – “Could God ever use me again?” – I had failed him so miserably – taken the credit for something He was doing.

All of us have major failures of the past or even on going. Where we have fallen short – missed the mark. How can God work in such a life as mine?

If you're like me, you experience that too - and then Rahab's story is for us.

### ***The Scriptures – Joshua 2:1-21; 6:20-25; Hebrews 11:31***

When I was a 16 year old atheistic snob – my friends and I knew everything. One day a substitute teacher in German class began talking about God and the Bible. We always loved to get substitute teachers off the track. We were merciless. We were so smart and she was so dumb. We started bombarding her with questions about the Bible? Who were the wives of Cain and Abel? What about this and what about that.

Her response made absolutely no sense – In those days most Bibles had a scarlet thread in them for a book mark – and she pointed to that – “There is a scarlet thread running through the whole Bible symbolizing the blood of Christ and His cleansing.” We had specific questions – she had a scarlet thread.

We laughed and mocked and didn't see how that answered any of our questions. Five years later I learned that it answered everything. 41 years later her seemingly meaningless answers are the only answers I remember from any substitute teacher in 17 years of schooling. The Word of God is amazing that way- it can surprise you.

The book of Joshua is about Israel entering the promised Land under Joshua's leadership. It starts with Joshua's commissioning in Chapter 1. But then Chapter 2 doesn't begin with the great exploits of the military hero – but with the heroic exploits of a woman – and not just a woman but an idol worshiping Canaanite women - not just a Canaanite woman – but a prostitute. Let's hear the word of God and how Rahab's faith held on by a scarlet thread .

People of God here the Word of God

#### **Joshua 2:1-21 (5 min 30 seconds)**

##### **Rahab Shelters Spies**

<sup>1</sup>Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho " So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.

<sup>2</sup>It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." <sup>3</sup>And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."

<sup>4</sup>But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. <sup>5</sup>"It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."

<sup>6</sup>But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof.

<sup>7</sup> So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.

<sup>8</sup> Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, <sup>9</sup> and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. <sup>10</sup> For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. <sup>11</sup> When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. <sup>12</sup> Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, <sup>13</sup> and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."

<sup>14</sup> So the men said to her, "Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

#### **The Promise to Rahab**

<sup>15</sup> Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. <sup>16</sup> She said to them, "Go to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way."

<sup>17</sup> The men said to her, "We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, <sup>18</sup> unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father's household. <sup>19</sup> It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. <sup>20</sup> But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear."

<sup>21</sup> She said, "According to your words, so be it." So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

#### **Joshua 6:20-25 – After the people of Israel had circled the city for seven days**

<sup>20</sup> So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city.

<sup>22</sup> Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "*Go into the harlot's house* and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her." <sup>23</sup> So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel. ... <sup>25</sup> However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

## Hebrews 11:31

<sup>31</sup>By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

### *Rahab's Faith*

One of the first questions we need to ask as we look at our texts – is where does Rahab show faith in God – our text says that it was “by faith” that Rahab did not perish. Let’s first look at her own words.

#### **Words**

Verse 9 - “I know that the Lord has given you the land” – Not that I know an army of several hundred thousand can defeat a fortified town of one or two thousand people. Not that I **think** you have a good chance of taking over the land – but **I know**. Could she prove it? No – but with biblical kamikaze faith – there comes an assurance – “faith is the assurance of things hoped for.”

Verse 10 – “For we have heard how the Lord dried up the Red Sea before you.” – Faith comes from hearing the Word of God – this wasn’t something written in the scriptures – but somehow she had heard of what God was doing. And she recognized that it was God at work. Israel didn’t hear about the Lord drying up the Red Sea – they experienced it – yet they didn’t translate that into the fact that God had given them the land. 40 years earlier, 12 spies went into the land and all but two they didn’t think God had given them the land. Rahab – the idol worshiping Canaanite prostitute – saw the same hand of God and understood the implications. So often in the scriptures, as we do today, we find different accountings of the same event – God speaks – but some call it thunder – God heals – but some see it as chance. Rahab heard the account – and believed it. That’s faith.

Verse 11 – “for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” Even though the Lord was still *your* God – we see Rahab as one who comes to God believing that He is. Another powerful faith statement.

Verse 12 – “Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD ...” Notice that this too is a faith statement – a statement putting herself under the protection of the Lord. That’s faith.

#### **Deeds**

But Rahab put her beliefs into action – Our text says that “she welcomed the spies in peace.” She protected them – at great risk to her life - in hiding them. What she did was treason. In any civilization – a capital offense worthy of death.

We see in Rahab both statements of faith coupled with very risky kamikaze action. James in his letter, uses her as an example of one whose actions brought justification – that proved her faith. Faith and action are integrally linked in this whole series – they’re part of the title. How Faith and Action take us to the Edge. Faith is not just a set of statements that we give intellectual assent to – not just the brain cells lined up right – And God sits in heaven and says – I am so pleased her thoughts are lined up– God pleasing kamikaze faith propels us into action – actions that take us to the edge. And that’s what we see in Rahab.

## **How God Redeemed Rahab**

So what happened to Rahab? In “Christianeze” we say that she was redeemed – she experienced redemption. Unlike a lot of words that we use in our faith – this one is used in secular circumstances

In the world of finance it can be used to describe the act of purchasing back something previously sold.

That’s exactly how we use it – redemption is what happens when Christ’s blood buys back that which was previously sold (we are bought with a price because we were sold under sin). That which previously was of no worth. You see - the worth of an object is not intrinsic in itself – the worth of an object is what the buyer is willing to spend on the object. Sometimes I look at what people spend on collectibles or some famous person’s memorabilia and ask – Is it really worth that much? Yes it is. The worth of an object is what someone else is willing to pay to have it. Our worth is not based on what we have done – good or bad –but on what God was willing to pay for us. He has done that – he has done that for you – he has done that for me.

### **How did God redeem Rahab?**

One thing you do with things you own – is that you protect them. God did that for Rahab. Did you notice that our text tells us twice that her house was on the wall? The Holy Spirit really wanted you to know that her house was on the wall. She let the spies down with a cord from the wall. Her window had to look out from on top of the wall. What happened to the walls? Somehow – by God’s protection – Rahab’s house was left standing – after the walls fell.

But God did more than that – he used the same cord that rescued the Israelites – to rescue Rahab. It was the scarlet cord – hanging from her window – that told the Israelites to protect her.

But God did more than that – He used that scarlet cord to bind her to the Israelites. She became connected to God’s people – God’s redemption brought her into the family of God.

But God did more than that - after binding her with the scarlet cord to the family of God – God used Rahab in the community. She became the mother of Boaz the husband of Ruth Great Grandmother of David – in the lineage of Christ. God took the very gift that she dragged through the mud (her sexuality) and used it for his purposes – he put her into the lineage of the Messiah. Now that is beyond what anyone could have imagined!!

That’s what redemption is all about – taking that which was worthless and making it into more than we can imagine. So -

### **How did Rahab Respond to being Redeemed?**

The Bible always refers to her as Rahab the harlot. In Hebrews 11 – the sins of the other saints in Hebrews 11 are not mentioned. But Rahab – here and every where in scripture – she is known as the harlot. Why would God do this? I cannot prove this – but from what I know of my God – it is Rahab that adopted that name. God doesn’t drag my past sins out and

hang them like a name tag around my neck. “Bob the Proud” Notice how in Joshua 6:25 – after she is living among the Jews – she is still known as Rahab the harlot. When the book was written – that’s what she was known as.

I believe that Rahab wanted the world to know – if Yahweh the God of Israel can save and deliver and redeem me – he can redeem you – no matter what you have done in the past or what your present looks like now.

### **Can God accept / redeem me**

That brings us to the question of the day? Can God accept me / use me / – even with my past – even with what’s going on in my life right now?

I have some one who wants to share what God has done for him. I want to invite my brother Tim now to share a bit of his story – Tim.

I have to say that my wife was a little nervous when I told her I was going to give my testimony today and she heard that the sermon was about Rahab the Harlot. She had a few questions for me.

I want to share a bit of my life and what God has done in my life and tell my story - read you a few things to paint the background for my story.

I was just graduating from High School – ready to head off to college. My brother Peter had become a Christian about a year before. I was not a Christian and was living very much a wild and crazy young life. He sent me this card as I was graduating. He said:

Congratulations brother – I’m trusting and praying that you’re really going to go places. Good luck with the trip to Europe and remember that you’re going to go farther and do more with your life if your working with God instead of at cross purposes. Read the gospel of John. If you are all anxious about school and what direction you’re heading this fall – remember it’s easy to lose yourself at school while you’re trying to find yourself on your own. But it’s easier to find God through Jesus Christ and then to begin to really discover who you are – the excellent person that God created you to be. I love you Tim and want the very best for you. The best – which I am convinced only God can provide once you have opened the doors and given him a place in your life. I really believe that you aren’t going to waste as much time as I did before you begin to experience God’s best. Take care. Lots of love.

Pete

So I went off to school – he was going to UCONN and I was going to Eastern. I started going to Campus Crusades over at UCONN – and I made a decision to accept Jesus into my heart. I really believe that that was a genuine thing. What I didn’t do at that point of my life was to make Him Lord of my life. I would alternate between Campus Crusade meetings and keg parties at Eastern.

Needless to say – that didn’t work real well. And over the period of the next 8 or 10 years I really went to a place that I hope most people don’t have to go – through drugs and alcohol.

When I was about 27, I got sober for the first time. For about 11 years after that I stayed sober and drug free. God really began to work in my life and change my life and change who I had become – but I still was not surrendered. I was not walking in obedience.

About 8 years ago I hurt my back and started taking pain medication to help me cope with my physical pain. And that started me down a new downward spiral. And all that time I was here at The Barn. Every thing looked good on the outside. The addiction to the pain medication brought me to a place I had never been when I was drinking. It was very dark and was a physical addiction that I didn't have to alcohol.

When I really hit bottom – it was the first thing I thought about when I got up and the last thing I thought about when I went to bed. And my world got very small. I hid it from every body. My wife. My children. My brother who lives two doors down from me – David.

It brought me to my knees literally. I had no place else to turn – but to God. And I cried out. "Help me." And I came clean. I told my wife what was going on. I called my doctor and told him "I don't know what to do here." But I was full of fear. I was hopeless. I was isolated. I had no gratitude in my heart. I couldn't see past my pain.

That bottom was the beginning of a new life for me. I started taking very small steps back to God – turning my face to him. Asking Him – moment by moment to re-build my life in a new way. And for me – it's not something I do perfectly. But where I was 3 ½ years ago and where I am today is just night and day.

I went from that very dark place to the place where today I can look people in the eye and say "I would not trade my life for anyone else I know." I have the trust of my wife and my children. Respect from the people I care about.

My friend Bob Cooley was really instrumental in this – saying some really hard things to me that I needed to hear. But God has taken that experience and turned it for good. He uses me now. I came to Him broken and bleeding and feeling like there is nothing in this world that I have to offer to God. And yet he continues to amaze me every day.

What I really want to say this morning is that if you are in that place – carrying that pain – that shame – from the past – whatever it is between you and God. Invite Him into that place. Let Him in. Because He's not going to bully His way in. He's not going to force your hand. He'll let you go to a place where you have to turn to him. And when you do – amazing things happen.

I just want to read something. About 4 months after I got to this place – I told my wife what was going on – I shared a fair amount of this with my 16 year old daughter Nicole – On Father's day she gave me this book *You have what it takes – What every father needs to Know*. She wrote this on the inside.

Daddy. I love you so much. Even though at times it goes unspoken, you're everything that I could ever want in a dad. I thank you so much for that. You've got more than what it takes and what we want. You're not a failure to me or to anyone else in this family. God doesn't make mistakes. You are such a God given gift. And I hope that you will come to feel that for yourself and find your worth in Christ. Because you're not worthless and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I'll be praying for healing in whatever area your heart has been hurting lately. I cannot express how much you

mean to me lately on this little page. I just want to tell you that I love you and God bless.

Nicole

Tim that took courage – thank you for sharing that with us.

### **Confession / Reflection Time – worship team come up**

What sins / past or present are keeping you from being all that God has in mind for you? What gift of God have you dragged through the mud that is now weighing you down - keeping you from being all God wants you to be? It is the work of the enemy to dredge up the past mud and the work of God to cleanse.

In the Old Testament, on the day of Yom Kippur – the day of atonement the sins of all of the people were put upon a goat – the scapegoat. A scarlet cord was placed on the head of the goat and the goat was sent out into the wilderness as a symbol of God taking away their sins. The Talmud (which is a record of discussions of the rabbis of Israel) tells us that the cord turned white signifying that the sins of the people were forgiven. The Talmud reports that in the year 30 AD, the cord stop turning white. For Christians the implication is obvious: The age of animal sacrifice is over – Jesus is the now the scapegoat – By His death / His blood / His cross – our sins are forgiven.



Rahab was protected and saved by the scarlet cord. That cord is a symbol of hope - a symbol of Christ's blood. Christ's blood is our means of escape – from the past. It's our means of protection for the future.

We need to let that truth penetrate our minds and our hearts.

**[Second Service Ending** Let's take some time and reflect on these truths. What I want you to do is to take some time and ask God

Where do I need to be rescued? Where do I need to be protected? What do I need to do in response to God's redeeming love?

Let's take some time in the quiet.

[silence]

There is no pit too deep that God's love is not deeper still.

[silence]

God we thank You for Your redeeming love – for Your cross. For Your blood.

What I want us to do now is for each of us to lay hold of the blood of Christ as symbolized by this scarlet cord. We have baskets of these at the end of each aisle – And during the singing of our closing song – I want to encourage each of you to come up get one of these.

Maybe you have never experienced God's redeeming love – but you know you need it. This can be your time to say Yes to God. Lord I want to trust you to redeem my life – to take what was worthless and turn me into something of great worth. Come up and get this symbol of His love.

Maybe you aren't sure that you want this yet. I want to encourage you to come up and get one. It took me 5 years for the message of the scarlet thread to become true – bring it with you for what might be.

For those who have experienced God's redemption – take it as a continued reminder of the cleansing Christ's blood on the wonderful cross.

Let's stand and worship our crucified and risen savior.]