

LIVE STRONG: Facing Life with Faith

The Face of Faith /Week 2 notes/ Joshua 2

I. Who is Rahab?

The Book of Joshua is a call to exercise faith. “Be strong and courageous” is not about our strength, but it is about being attached to the Lord, with a resolute mindset. God is leading Israel into a new land and they must collectively follow Him in faith.

But the first person God will use to teach us about faith is a woman named Rahab. Not only is she a woman, but she is a pagan woman living in a pagan city that has completely rejected God. Her background is one of idolatry, worshipping the Canaanite god Baal and his female counterpart, Asherah. The cultic worship of these false deities included extreme sexual perversion. Rahab has never known any other life. To complicate matters further, Rahab is a prostitute. Some critics of Scripture note that the Hebrew word for “harlot” can also be translated “innkeeper” thus questioning her occupation. But she is also referred to in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 as Rahab the harlot. In both of these Greek texts the word “harlot” means “prostitute”, “sex for hire”. Make no mistake; Rahab was a woman who pleased men for money. A prostitute. And yet in her culture there was no stigma attached to this occupation. It was simply her life. A life God was about to change.

Joshua sends two spies into the city of Jericho to gather information about the city. The men go to the house of the prostitute, Rahab. She takes them in, hides them, and lies to her countrymen about their whereabouts. Joshua 2:8-14 is an amazing conversation between Rahab and the spies.

She acknowledges that the LORD has given the city to Israel. She tells of hearing the stories that have floated across the desert for 40 years. She admits the city is cowering in fear, no courage left in any person. And then she makes an astonishing statement. Verse 11, **“For the LORD your GOD, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”** She has heard and she believes!

Based on what she has heard and what she believes, not only has she hidden the spies but Rahab also makes a bold request for the safety of her family. The spies agree with firm stipulations. Joshua 6:25 states that indeed her life and the lives of her family members was spared. She lived in the midst of Israel for the rest of her life. She married a man named Salmon. Her son Boaz married Ruth. Rahab the harlot was the great-great-grandmother of King David and she is listed in Matthew 1 in the lineage of Jesus. Hebrews 11 and James 2 hail her a woman of faith.

But is she a woman of faith because of what she believed or because of what she did? The answer is yes! Let’s explore this as we further define and understand faith.

II. What is Faith?

James 2:14-26 seems to be a contradictory passage of scripture, pitting belief and works against each other in an effort to define faith. And yet James is not trying to be confusing us at all. In fact, he is clarifying the misconception that faith is mental assent to facts. He is leading us to understand that faith cannot and is not simply knowledge about Christ, but it is a knowledge that gives way to trust/surrender and ultimately works (a lifestyle hallmarked by spiritual fruit). Faith is not simply a euphemism for belief, for as James 2:19 states even the demons believe...and tremble. But the demons do not trust. They do not surrender. They do not obey. They have no good fruit in their lives. Certainly we BELIEVE the truth about Christ, but a fuller understanding of belief is a “leaning into and trusting to the point of surrender and obedience.”

Rahab (and James) has demonstrated that there is a participation aspect of faith. Rahab heard and believed the truth. It was just a tiny seed of truth planted into her heart. Remember, she had only a little knowledge. She had only a pagan background. She had absolutely no understanding of why God was doing what He was doing to her city, but she believed ...and she acted on her belief. **Faith then can be further defined a: *acting on revealed truth. God reveals truth; we believe it and trust God enough to act on it.*** This is great news for you and me! It means that we (every Christian woman) are called to be women of faith—regardless of our past, our education, our vocation, or our pedigree..

III. How Does Faith Grow?

Rahab did not remain a prostitute. She came into the nation of Israel. She married an Israelite. She learned the history of her new people. She worshiped the LORD. She grew in her faith and so must we. Faith, however, does not grow because we will it to grow. We cannot claim louder and pray harder and expect faith to grow. Faith is a gift of grace. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith...” Even the faith we exercise at God’s offer of grace is a gift from Him. But like Rahab, we do not stay where we are. We grow in faith. But how?

A. God’s Word

Romans 10:17, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (NASV).

We do not will our faith to grow. It grows as we allow the Holy Spirit to apply the truth of Scripture to our lives. Henry Blackaby said, “The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to teach us the will of God and the ways of God.” There is no substitute for the Word of God in the life of a believer.

Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. All 176 verses are about the benefit of God’s Word in the life of a believer. Psalm 119:105 is a strong analogy of Scripture and faith. “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path.” (KJV) Faith is not a leap into the dark. In fact, this verse is saying the opposite. Faith is a step into the light of truth. We used the illustration in class of a flashlight on a dark night. If we shine the light down the road trying to see what is ahead, we will stumble over the very thing that is at our feet. God’s Word shines one beam of truth and we by faith step into it—we trust God enough to obey that truth and live in that truth. Then God gives us, through His Word, the next beam of truth, and we step into it. He does not give us light for things way out there ahead, only the light for the very next step.

B. Difficult Circumstances

God uses the difficult circumstances of life to grow us in our faith. He does not cause difficulty SO THAT we can grow in faith. But difficulty things happen in this fallen world and God uses them for His glory and our benefit. James 1:2-4 are challenging verses.

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”(NASV).

Consider it all joy—Count each and every part of the trial. Joy does not mean happy. Joy is an inner contentment only Christ can give. The trial is not joyfu,l but the work that God is doing through the trial is.

my brethren—These verses are for Christians

when you encounter—not if but when—stuff is going to happen! The word *encounter* means to fall into unexpectedly.

various trials—multicolored, different degrees of trials. Trials are not the result of our sinful choices. They are the difficulties of life that we did not expect and we did not cause by our actions.

knowing that the testing of your faith—confident that our faith is being put to the test to see if it is genuine. God does not need to know anything about the condition of our faith. We do. Trials show us the state, the depth, the condition of our faith.

produces—God is doing a work on the inside of us, but putting it on display on the outside for others to see.

endurance—the ability to remain under the trial through the strength of Christ in you. He does not remove the trial, but He does a work in us while we remain in the trial.

And let endurance have its perfect result—allow endurance to mature you. “Perfect “ does not mean sinless perfection, It means maturity

Granted, I do not like this method of growth! I like peace, and calm, and green pastures, and still waters. But if God allowed us to stay in small, still pools all of our lives, our faith would remain small as well. But sometimes He allows us to be tossed into the large ponds of life. While it seems overwhelming, Christ is with us and in us, and in the large ponds, our faith grows.

Do we sometimes grow weary? Or afraid? Does our faith seem to be weak at times? Of course!. But even then, God is faithful. Three quick examples

Psalms 77. The psalmist is discouraged. He thinks God has abandoned him or is angry or ungracious. (Verses 7-10). But then there is a turning point. A re-focusing. The psalmist says grief has caused him to think this way, and instead of questioning the goodness of God, he will remember the ways God has been faithful in the past (verses 11-13).

Luke 7:18-28. John the Baptist is in prison. He is discouraged and questioning if Jesus is really the Messiah. He sends his followers to ask Jesus. “Are you the ONE who is coming, or do we look for another?” Jesus turns and begins healing the sick and dealing with all kinds of afflictions. Then He tells John’s disciples to go tell John what they have seen. Jesus wants to refocus John back to the truth. Then Jesus speaks highly of John to the crowd who is listening. He doesn’t condemn John for being discouraged in his faith. Neither does He condemn us when we are burdened, doubting, or discouraged. He simply refocuses us back toward truth. Back to the Word of God which always reveals the nature of God.

Habakkuk 3:17-19. This little book is a conversation between the prophet and God. God has given Habakkuk a vision of God’s coming judgement on Judah. Habakkuk does not understand, nor does he like what he has seen. He therefore questions God’s goodness (1:2-4). God however encourages Habakkuk to live by faith not by sight (2:4). God refocuses Habakkuk so that the prophet trusts God even though Habakkuk doesn’t completely understand all that is going to happen. **Verses 17-19 are a powerful testimony to faith—even when we do not understand.**

In closing, Rahab is an unlikely woman to teach us so much about faith. Interestingly, Scripture never lets us forget she is Rahab, the harlot. Why does God allow the New Testament writers to include her past life? I believe, it is a testimony to the amazing grace of God. Grace is sufficient for anyone, no matter our past or our baggage. And any believer can be the face of faith—even you. Even me.

