

God's Amazing Grace

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[0 : 00] Well, we turn to our Bibles now and to our reading this evening, which is in the book of Joshua. If you have the Church Visitor's Bible, that is page 178.

If not, it's very near the beginning of your Bibles. Sixth book of the Bible, after Deuteronomy. And Paul Brennan began a series in Joshua last Sunday evening, in Joshua chapter 1. And we pick up the story on the brink of the land of Canaan, as the people muster and are preparing themselves to go and cross the Jordan and enter the land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

And what an exciting chapter this proves to be. Joshua chapter 2, verse 1. And Joshua, the son of Nun, sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, Go view the land, especially Jericho. And they went and came into the house of a prostitute, whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told to the king of Jericho, Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.

[1 : 16] And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land. But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them.

And she said, True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I don't know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you'll overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.

So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out. Before the men laid down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land and that the fear of you has fallen upon us and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

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 devoted to destruction.

[2 : 35] And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted. And there was no spirit left in any man because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house.

And give me a sure sign that you will save my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them and deliver our lives from death. And the men said to her, Our life for yours, even to death.

If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land, we will deal kindly and faithfully with you. Then she let them down by a rope through the window.

Her house was built into the city wall so that she lived in the wall. And she said to them, Go to the hills or the pursuers will encounter you and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned.

[3 : 42] And then afterward you may go your way. The men said to her, We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you've made to us, made us swear.

Behold, when we come into the land, you'll tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down. And you'll gather your father and mother into your house and your brothers and all your father's household.

And if anyone goes out of the house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in this house, his blood shall be on our head.

But if you tell this business of ours, then we'll be guiltless with respect to your oath that you've made us swear. And she said, According to your words, so be it.

Then she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window. They departed and went into the hills and remained there three days until the pursuers returned.

[4 : 47] And the pursuers searched all along the way and found nothing. Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua, the son of Nun.

And they told him all that had happened to them. And they said to Joshua, Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us. Amen. May God bless to us. His word. Well, please do turn to Joshua 2.

Please have that in front of you as we spend a few moments now thinking about this chapter together. Now, this really is a quite remarkable chapter for a couple of reasons.

First, in a sense, this chapter doesn't need to exist, in a sense. At the end of chapter 1, we are on the brink of battle. We are preparing to cross the Jordan.

[6 : 01] The people are gathered. They're mustering for war. And that's where we left at the end of chapter 1. And you could easily jump from the end of chapter 1 straight into the start of chapter 3.

It just picks up the story just from the end of chapter 1. And so, in a sense, you could rip out chapter 2 and not skip a beat. The narrative would just flow on.

So, why is chapter 2 there? Clearly, the author included it for a very good reason, even though it seems a slight sidestep from the main thrust of the narrative.

Second reason it's a remarkable chapter is because it focuses not on Israel, not on Joshua, but on a Canaanite.

And not just any Canaanite, but a prostitute. Sure, the king of Jericho gets a brief mention, but the focus on this chapter is on a pagan prostitute.

[6 : 59] Now, isn't that just staggering? Isn't that astonishing? So, what is this all about? Well, it's a very carefully structured passage. It's a bit like a sandwich.

It begins and ends with the spies. They're being sent out by Joshua, and they're coming back and reporting back to him. That's like the bread of the sandwich.

But in the middle, at the center of the story, the real meat of this sandwich is Rahab, the pagan prostitute. Her actions, her words fill the meat of this sandwich.

And that's where we'll spend most of our time, and that's where we'll begin. So, looking first at chapter 2 from verse 1, the second half of verse 1, and through to 21.

And we see here the astonishing God who shocks us with his grace. We see in this remarkable chapter that there is a battle looming.

[7 : 59] There is a great judgment coming for the land of Canaan. But not before a pagan prostitute is saved from the coming judgment. Now, that is staggering.

That is a huge surprise. As we begin chapter 2, we think it's going to be a story all about military reconnaissance, about spies going into the land, seeking out what's going on.

But really, it turns out that the Lord is busy at work saving a pagan. It's a reminder, isn't it, of God's great promises made to Abraham.

Not just that God would give his people a land and a place, but also that his people would be a blessing to the nations, and that those who bless Israel will themselves be blessed.

She had another example here at the side of Joshua of the Lord, keeping all of his promises, not just promises of a great kingdom, but of real grace, shown to real people, grace shown to a pagan prostitute.

[9 : 05] So let's trace the action through the story, and it's pretty astonishing, isn't it? It really is the stuff of Bond. This wouldn't be out of place in a John le Carre novel. It has everything. Intrigue, suspense, a few close shaves, a dramatic escape.

Now, it begins as Joshua sends out these two spies, which in itself ought to be a bit of a cause for alarm.

The last time that spies were sent out into the land of Canaan, it did not end well. Think back 40 decades. Those 12 spies who went into the land and came back, and everything fell apart as the majority reports expressed disbelief in what God had promised.

Was it really a wise move for Joshua to send in spies again? You get a river crossing by stealth, and then into the stronghold of Jericho, and things seem to go downhill pretty quick from there.

The spies end up in a brothel, and somehow the king of Jericho finds out not only who they are, but what they've come to do. The tension is running high.

[10:18] What's going to happen to these two spies? Are they going to get found out? Is it going to be the end of the conquest? Will they make it back to Joshua? Will this be Kadesh Barnea all over again, a repeat of 40 years ago?

Well, enter Rahab. She takes center stage, and in her story, not only do we see the bigger picture of the safe return of the spies and the encouraging report they're able to bring back to Joshua, but we see the astonishing God who shocks us with his grace in the faith of a pagan prostitute.

The king, as we've seen, has heard about the spies. He knows where they are, and so he sends around the Jericho cops, around to Rahab's. What will she do?

Knock on the door. What's going to happen? Well, she deflects the officers, having already hidden the spies. She says, yep, they were here, but I've no idea who they were.

I don't know where they came from, and they've left. You've missed them. But not long, go quickly. You'll catch them. And off go the Jericho cops, dashing after the spies. Rahab deceived them.

[11:36] She hid the spies. But let's not be sidetracked by Rahab's deception. The text is silent on it. It doesn't comment. It doesn't evaluate her actions. But clearly, by her very actions in hiding the spies, she demonstrates a complete change, a complete turnaround in her allegiance.

So easily could she have given up the spies when the Jericho police came around. That would have been an easy thing to do. But she risked them coming in, finding out she'd been lying, and the consequences would have been devastating.

She changed allegiance. She sided with the spies against her own city. She aligns herself with the spies from Joshua. And in fact, Hebrews 11 identifies her friendly welcome of the spies as an indicator of her faith.

Her actions evidence the reality of her change in loyalty. Now, what on earth happened to Rahab to make her do that? Well, let's look at the next scene as she creeps up the stairs to go and speak to the spies.

And we have an extraordinary confession. And we see in this confession that Rahab has come to know the Lord and the mighty acts that he has done for his people.

[12:58] These words show us why Rahab throws herself on the Lord's mercy and shifts her loyalty from Jericho to Joshua. So just trace her words from verse 8 and verse 9 as she confesses what she knows about the Lord.

She knows, verse 8, that the Lord has given the land to Israel. She knows that the fear of the Lord has fallen upon everyone. She knows that all the inhabitants melt away because of Israel.

She knows that Jericho, her own city, the whole land, is about to face defeat. It is about to be crushed. And she knows this because, verse 10, she has heard about the mighty acts of God.

The crossing of the Red Sea, the exodus from Egypt, the defeat of the two kings on the other side of the Jordan. She's heard about it. News of God's mighty acts had reached Jericho.

And verse 11, their hearts melted. It was hearing about the mighty acts of God that was the basis of her faith. That's always the way, isn't it?

[14:14] Biblical faith is based on testimony of God's acts. It is based on his actions in history. That is how it was for Rahab.

Faith has its basis in the facts of what God has done for his people. That is how people begin to come to faith then and now. But it doesn't stop at merely hearing about what God has done.

What Rahab heard led her to confess the supreme sovereignty and majesty of the Lord. Have a look at the second half of verse 11. For the Lord, your God, he is the God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

She's identifying the God of Israel as the God in the heavens and the earth. He alone is God.

There's no one else like him. He alone is sovereign.

Even over all the gods of Canaan. The Lord of Israel is the Lord, she confesses. There is no one else like him.

[15:21] She knows that all the earth belongs to him. And if he wants to give Jericho and Canaan to the Israelites, he can. Nothing can stop him from doing it. She believes, perhaps more certainly than many of Joshua's army, that God really was giving them Jericho.

He really was giving them the land of Canaan. And she knew that meant judgment for her and her city. And so, in light of what she knows and what she confesses, she does the only thing she can

do.

And that is to seek refuge in the Lord. Look down at verse 12. She flings herself on God's mercy in the face of the coming judgment.

She seeks refuge from God. And she seeks it in God. In his people. It's not just a case of her confession of the truth.

Faith is more than just words on lips. It means loyalty. It means loyalty to God and to his people. And it meant for Rahab, not betraying the spies.

[16:32] It meant tying a scarlet cord to her window. It meant gathering her household together under her roof. In all this, Rahab demonstrates real faith.

See, real faith is visible, tangible, real life loyalty to Christ and to his people. It's often difficult, isn't it, to be able to define what faith is.

But the New Testament commends Rahab for her faith. She is an example of faith. James speaks of Rahab in a passage all about faith. He's basically saying, do you want to know what real faith is? What saving faith is? Well, Rahab. Consider Rahab. She is an example of real faith. Her faith was demonstrated in actions of allegiance to the Lord and his people.

It meant standing with them, throwing her lot in with them. And that's the same today, isn't it? Real faith means standing with God's people, throwing a lot in with them.

[17:44] It's not about the right sort of evangelical language. The right formulas. Plenty of religious leaders in Jesus' time had that, didn't they?

But they hated him. They knew it all. They could articulate it, but they hated Jesus. But blind beggars got up, followed him, wanted to be known with him.

They loved him. They followed him. They wanted to be among his people. That is faith. Now, some Christians today are obsessed, aren't they, with people being able to articulate all the right sort of language?

Well, they're not really true Christians at all. But the spies didn't care two jots about that. Rahab's actions spoke far louder than her words.

Her allegiance to them, her not betraying them, tying that cord in the window, that saved her. Faith cannot be separated from the actions of allegiance to the Lord and his people.

[18:46] They come together. And as we see a few chapters later in Joshua, she was indeed saved. Rahab, a pagan prostitute, as Jericho was under siege, she and her household were saved.

They were included into the Lord's people. You can read about that in chapter 6. That is truly shocking. Rahab, of all the people in Cana, of all the people in Jericho, Rahab.

That is God's astonishing grace. And before we move on to consider the bread of our chapter, a few implications for us arising from Rahab's faith and God's extraordinary grace.

First implication, we are to marvel at God's grace. Marvel at his grace even to a pagan prostitute. So we are not to write anyone off.

Nobody is beyond God's grace. He's shown it to you after all, hasn't he? He chooses the sort of person that we would write off in a millisecond.

[20:01] From a human point of view, Rahab's prospects were not good. But the Lord showed his marvelous grace to her and she is welcomed into the people of God.

That is how God works then and now. It's how he always works because he delights to save sinners. He delights to save fallen people.

And isn't it just the most encouraging thing when you see God at work in the life of an individual? Nothing's more encouraging. Maybe it's someone you've long prayed for.

Someone you just think is beyond hope. Perhaps a child who for many years has seemed disinterested in the things of the Lord, on the fringes. And they throw their lot in with the Lord and his people.

Isn't that encouraging? Maybe it's the sort of person you just turn your nose up at. God wouldn't be interested in them. But he is. The church is a refuge for sinners.

[21:06] For people just like Rahab. So let's not fall into the trap of thinking that church is for people who are the finished article. It's not a place where perfection is going to be achieved.

It's not the sort of place where everyone's going to be able to articulate the core doctrines of the faith just as you'd like. Think of our Iranian brothers and sisters downstairs.

Many of them can't give an extensive, well thought out, explained reasoning of their faith. But they've thrown their lot in with his people. With us.

They love the Lord. The church is a hospital for the sick, isn't it? It's not a catwalk for the perfect. Now if we're honest with ourselves for just a few seconds we'll realize that's true of the people around us.

And if we think for a few more seconds we'll realize it's true of us. How gracious God was to reach down to us to bring our sin to his people.

[22 : 17] It's only by the grace of God that we are included in his family. Will you marvel at that? Second implication.

Throw yourself on God's grace. Rahab knew that the Lord was sovereign. She had been faced with the reality of the Lord who was about to judge her entire city.

And rightly she's afraid. She's fearful. In fact all of Jericho is fearful about what is to happen to their city. But unlike the rest of Jericho who knew as much as she did they all knew about the Lord's acts what he had been doing.

But unlike the rest of Jericho she didn't in her fear harden her opposition harden her obstinacy in the face of the sovereign Lord. she has no choice but to risk all on the mercy of God by seeking a place amongst his people.

She didn't harden herself against him she threw herself on his grace. She has no idea if she can be saved but she stakes all in hope and she finds that there is an open door that even to her even to Rahab there's an open door to the one who knocks it will be open that's grace.

[23 : 45] Now when people sometimes come to the reality of their sin when they realise that there is a holy God who will rightly judge them as they see that as they understand that as they rightly fear and wonder can there possibly be acceptance for me perhaps especially so for a prostitute like Rahab but the answer is yes there is grace for all who throw themselves upon Christ for his mercy.

Now perhaps that's you even here this evening you've come face to face with the living gods you've heard the testimony of his mighty acts you've confessed with your lips that he is the sovereign lord of all you know there's a judgment coming will you seek refuge in him will you fling yourself upon his grace that is the only hope will you fling yourself on his grace but there is a necessary corollary of God's grace and it's this our final implication on this point don't presume on God's grace don't presume on his grace for Rahab to make no choice or to choose to side against the Lord's people to stick with Jericho that was to face certain disaster there is no other way to escape the coming judgment than to side yourself with God to fling yourself upon his grace no special exemptions no appeals to immunity don't presume on God's grace but even to the greatest most unlikely outsider God can call can bring into the story they can find their true destiny in him the marvel is that Rahab is not just recorded here in Joshua chapter 2 not only is she wonderfully included in the people of God chapter 6 but she's an ancestor of Christ Rahab makes it onto the first page of the New Testament in Matthew's genealogy there she is what astonishing grace not only does the Lord include her and his people but he is using her she's an ancestor to the Lord Jesus Christ God's grace extends to even the most unlikely of people well there's the meat of chapter 2 let's finish with the bread the book ends at the start and end of the chapter so verse 1 and verses 22 to 24 we see here the God who stoops to bear with his fearful people the God who stoops to bear with a fearful people so let's zoom back a bit and see the bigger story it's as if a camera is pulling back from Rahab's house imagine you're on Google maps you've zoomed right in on Rahab's house and now we zoom out a bit we see all of Jericho and we zoom out a bit further we see the river Jordan and a bit further and we see Israel's army camped just on the other side of the Jordan preparing for conquest what's the big picture for the big story in Joshua well it's this look again at the spies report in verse 24 they come back to Joshua and they repeat the words they've heard from Rahab truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands and also all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us now what an encouraging report Jericho is already defeated the people are melting in fear that is just the sort of thing you want to hear before going into battle now I don't have much experience of battle you can perhaps tell but when it came to football at school for us that was battle and nothing would give us more confidence than knowing that the opposition were quaking in their boots and occasionally you'd hear reports filtering through that the opposition were scared that gave me great confidence it gave the whole team huge confidence as we went into that match and for

Joshua and his army nothing could have encouraged them more than this report now God didn't have to give them this report God didn't have to give them the encouragement of this chapter but how emboldening would it have been to receive that report from the spies although God had

already given them his word chapter 1 he had already promised them the land it was a sure thing but he indulges their weakness he graciously removes all their doubts with the events of chapter 2 he confirms to them what he has promised he assures them that the victory is already won how encouraging it would be to know that the Lord rules supreme even over the hearts of the men of Jericho even that whole city even Rahab the Lord is supreme over all their hearts now mustn't that have encouraged Joshua and his people but not only them but every

[29 : 26] Israelite who read about this were who read these words ever after who read this report who read this chapter especially when they were under threat facing difficulty and opposition how encouraging to know that the Lord reigns supreme over every man's heart now if they had confidence if they were encouraged by this how much more can we be encouraged we just have to look to Rahab's ancestor the Lord Jesus Christ we can look back on his victory his victory on the cross confirmed in the resurrection and we know that he has promised to never leave us or forsake us that is a promise to us but not only that his spirit is upon the church so that through us as we spread the gospel going into all the world we know that through him his grace he is conquering the world he is building his church and he will fill the world with his glory that is what we are engaged with now isn't it encouraging to know that he is with us his spirit dwells upon us but not only that not only do we know the big story the great plan that

God is out working here and now but doesn't the Lord in his kindness give us real encouragements up close personal encouragements to see and marvel at 2 just like here in Joshua 2 God confirms his promises to us in so many small ways now of course we know that the Lord's word is sufficient we know that the gospel is true but isn't it just simply wonderful when the Lord gives us little tokens of his faithfulness he plonks something right in our path so clear we can't miss it and we can't help but feel sure of God's promises even though we know his promises in his word are true he gives us little signs small providences that help us to feel assured God we shouldn't expect those little tokens we shouldn't demand them but

God in his grace knows that we are often a fearful people he knows that we are but dust and so in his marvelous grace he does give us small tokens that graciously confirm to us his already sure word he brings someone to you at just the right time it might be a friendship that struck up just when you needed encouragements you're given real solid practical help when things are getting really tight financially a friend you've written off entirely comes to faith a family member who has resolutely wanted nothing to do with the Christian faith with the church accepts an invitation to a Christian carol service as a church we've known something of these undeserved unexpected tokens of God's faithfulness October 2012 just a few weeks before we left the building on Buchanan Street over 50 people joined the church in membership now didn't that embolden you embolden us encourage us at just the right time God didn't have to give us that token of faithfulness but what a good and kind and gentle God he is that he stoops to encourage a fearful people like us in those sorts of ways so let's be encouraged at God's faithfulness in these small tokens of grace not that we're to be super spiritual by looking for God's providence in every minute detail in life but we do need to recognize that the Lord in his kindness does show us faithfulness he helps us to feel his promises in very real ways so let's give thanks for those take courage for them acknowledge them talk about them share them encourage others the

Lord didn't have to give Israel this great encouragement of chapter 2 he'd give them his word his word was a sure thing but he gives them super added encouragement confirmation that he was with them that he was going to give them the victory how gracious God is that he stoops to give us encouragement such as that our God is extravagant in his grace isn't he stooping down to encourage his people showing grace to people that we would write off to the Rahabs of this world people just like you and me what amazing grace God shows to his people what amazing grace he shows to you let me pray father we give you thanks for your great faithfulness how sure your promises are and how encouraging it is to read a passage like this which speaks of your great astonishing grace and your great faithfulness to your people and what courage we can take from it knowing that the promises you give to us promises of a heavenly city of an eternal kingdom a new creation hope of victory and battle assurance that it's won thank you that we can look back to all that the

[35 : 46] Lord Jesus has done the way in which he encourages us by his spirit now and all that he holds for us in the future we thank you that you are a gracious God who stoops to encourage his people we thank you in the Lord Jesus Amen