

Rahab the Prostitute

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I would ask you all to turn to Hebrews 11. Isn't it interesting that with God's sovereignty as we heard about in the last hour, doesn't it amaze you that at the same time you can find verses like we find in John 5 where Jesus is telling the Jews about how John the Baptist bore witness to Him, and He says I don't say this to you because I need the witness of men. He said I say this to you that you might be saved. Isn't that amazing? He would seek to lay hold on man's reasoning faculties - not just leave it to the sovereignty of God, but put forth a case that you might think about. That's what I want to do at this time. Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11. I'm going to read here and I'd like you to follow along. And I'm going to, at times, skip some verses. But I want you to think about the people that are listed. Most of you are aware, Hebrews 11, we have a list of those men and women of faith. As I read about these people, I want you to do what God does not do. God does not dump the faults and the sins, the dirt - He doesn't dump all that out here. We can find a lot of that in other places, but not here. But let's do what He doesn't do. What I want you to do is as we think of these people, think about what you know about them. Think about their sins. Think about their failures as we read through here. Let's pick up in Hebrews 11:4.

"By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts, and through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith, Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God had taken him. Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God." Jump to verse 7. "By faith, Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this, he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going." Jump to v. 11. "By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised."

Jump to v. 20. "By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith, Jacob, when dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. By faith, Moses, when he was born was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw that the child was beautiful and they were not afraid of the king's edict." Jump to v. 31. "By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms and forced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight." Verse 35, "Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and

even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated." Don't you love this? "Of whom the world was not worthy." Isn't that amazing that God would say that about His people? "...Wandering about in deserts, in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." What a list! People of whom the world was not worthy.

Let me ask you this. What makes one worthy to be listed here? A perfect life? Were you thinking about the sins of any of these people as we read through here? Jephthah. Did you catch Jephthah? He's here. I just went through the book of Judges with my family in family devotions. What a horrific vow! What do you think about that vow? Hasty maybe? What a vow to make before the Lord! Again, just with my family, Samson. You know, as I have teenagers, and we get done: what can we learn from the lives of Jephthah? What can we learn about a vow like that? What can we learn about the life of Samson?

Samson. He was kind of given to foreign women. What do you say to your children in family devotions about that? That here's Samson - a man of faith? We should imitate that? His parents did not approve. He was with a prostitute. Obviously, not the best example in certain ways. David is here. David is in the cloud of witnesses. We see him right there at the end. He's rattled off by the author. David. Isn't it interesting?

Here's what I want you to think about. The author of Hebrews throws these men out there. Not a word about Jephthah's vow. Not a word about Samson, other than he's a man of faith. Nothing about David's sin with Bathsheba. Nothing about Noah getting drunk. These guys are here. You remember Abraham and Sarah? They got a bit impatient. They were trying to fulfill the Messianic line, the covenant child. Let's bring Hagar into the picture. That wasn't really a good thing. Nothing about that here. Nothing at all. Moses. Moses had such a failure that he could not enter the Promised Land. He didn't give God the glory. But nothing about that. All of these folks are commended for their faith. And you know what's interesting? Their failures and their sins - they're not there. God passes over them. They're exalted as those of whom the world is not worthy. And what a joy! There's something just so glorious about that.

But you know, not too long ago, not all that many months, maybe a couple years back, I preached through Hebrews. And you know, I went through and I'm looking at all these men and these women here, and it's very comforting to see that their sins are not recorded. Their sins are not brought up. Even though we know full well from studying our Old Testament Scriptures that there's problems in the lives of some of these people. And yet it is so glorious! And you think the author of Hebrews, what does he want to do? He wants to encourage people. These are people who had named the name of Christ. Now they were in danger of drifting. This is a book to prevent drifting. That's what this is about: encouragement. Encourage those who are wavering. And you look at the lives of these people and you think, oh, how glorious that is to be covered by the blood of Christ. And you can be looked at by God as one of whom the world is not worthy and your sins are forgotten and they're as far as the east is from the west, and all that is great and it's glorious! And I'm studying through here and I get to verse 31. And quite honestly, at first I did not like this. And I'd read it many times, but that was the first time I was preaching through Hebrews. And I get to this - verse 31. "By faith, Rahab the prostitute... did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome..." she received in peace "the spies." You know what's interesting about this? This is the one and only negative thing said

about any of these people in the entire chapter. Rahab the prostitute. Does that make any of you feel any way?

Let's just think about this. Rahab - she's a believer. She's in the list. She has faith. Rahab's saved. Rahab is in glory right now. Right? She's forgiven. She's right here in the cloud of witnesses with Noah and Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, David, Samson. Samson doesn't get called a womanizer. Does he? David. He's not called a murderer here. He's not called an adulterer. That doesn't get pinned to his name. Not Uriah's murderer. Why is Rahab singled out for her sin and called a prostitute? You know what? The reality is the author of Hebrews could have easily left that off. And the reason we know that that can be done is because Matthew does it. Matthew calls her Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus Christ there in Matthew 1. He doesn't include "prostitute" or "harlot" there. Right? It's just not there. You know, we always think of Ruth's mother-in-law as being who? Naomi. But you know when you look at the genealogy, do you know she had another mother-in-law? By her second husband. Rahab. Matthew doesn't have to tag her with that. The point is Matthew did not feel compelled to mention Rahab's past.

Brethren, think with me here. I was jumping around in Scripture. Urbanus. Let's imagine this. Before I tell you about who Urbanus is - maybe some of you know. But imagine this. You've probably seen this. You can imagine. I don't know what I've seen, but I can imagine this carriage pulling up in front of a mansion. And these people, well-dressed, they're getting out and they're coming to a ball. Some kind of banquet - very formal. And they're walking in. And who's the guy who makes the announcement? I call him the butler. Is there a better name? But you can imagine it. "This is so-and-so." You can imagine that kind of thing. Great banquet. It's all spectacular and everything. And people are walking in. And here is Urbanus. Who's Urbanus? He's one of the guys at Rome. I'm taking it's a man. He is a servant of Jesus Christ. Or you go over to the Philippian letter. Here coming off this stage - here comes Clement. His name is in the Book of Life. And here's Paul and Silas - men who turned the world upside down. You're seeing all this right? And then you get out. And you come, and, "Here's John the Adulterer." It's like, whoa... what gives? I know about Urbanus over here. This guy wasn't perfect. My sins have been washed away too. How come I'm getting tagged with this? Isn't that how you would feel? And I'm looking through this list and I'm thinking... look, you have to realize, not a single negative thing is said about any of these people with that exception. That's it. That is all. Rahab the prostitute. Rahab the harlot. Can't you see her? Wait, Lord, my sins are forgiven too. Cast behind Your back. The depths of the sea. As far as the east is from the west. My sins too! Why? Why? Why is this negative thing said in this chapter about her?

See, those are the kind of questions that I don't know if you're puzzled by them, but it makes me ask, because I recognize this - when I study my Bible, I recognize I read in some places, you know, it's the glory of God to conceal a matter. And we're told in Proverbs 2 that if we dig, if we go to digging, we can find the knowledge of God. And I thought when I was going through this, well, this is worth digging into. Why? I don't know if I'll be able to answer it sufficiently for everybody, but let's just consider some observations about this.

The first observation - this jumps out at me. This author of Hebrews - notice something here. And I don't want to make too much out of this, but I feel like it has some significance. Notice what the author says in v. 32. "And what more shall I say?" What does that tell us he's doing? "What more shall I say? Time would fail me..." What is he saying right at this point? I'm

out of time. That's what he's saying. From here on out, the only names we get are kind of honorable mention. They're mentioned in passing. Right? V. 32: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets - just in passing, but you know what's interesting is everybody before this, they got the formal introduction: By faith, Rahab... It started, "By faith, Abel..." "By faith, Enoch..." "By faith, Noah..." "By faith, Abraham..." And this is interesting to me. The author of Hebrews does not wrap up until he tells us about Rahab. He doesn't finish. He could have. It's like he's determined he is not going to run out of time until he tells us about her. Because the truth is, he could have gone on. He could have told us about David. He could have told us about Samson, but he doesn't. Time would fail. At that point, he's ready to say time would fail, but he didn't say it before he got to Rahab. It's like he wanted to get - she's the last one that he deals with in this more comprehensive way. He's determined not to run out of time until he gets to Rahab. Once he has her out of the way, he feels liberty to wrap things up. Before that, our author wants to make sure that we get to consider her. That jumped out at me.

Here's the second thing I want you to think about with her. The fairer sex is not equally represented in Hebrews 11. Anybody know who the only other lady is that's mentioned here? Sarah. Sarah's the only other one. And you know what's interesting about Sarah? There was unbelief. She laughed. In fact, you know what? I heard John MacArthur preach a message on Sarah and he went on and on about how he doesn't even believe she should be here as the one having the faith in v. 11; that that's actually speaking about Abraham's faith. And he says because Sarah was anything but an example of faith. And when I preached through that, I showed that I didn't think necessarily that that was a fair evaluation. But certainly, you can go back and find some pretty significant flaws in this woman.

You know what's interesting? Sarah - the only other woman - let's just compare Sarah and Rahab. Not a single thing is said about Sarah - she laughed in unbelief - no, it's not there. But Rahab is a prostitute. Sarah. Do you know what Sarah means? It's the idea of princess. Do you know what Rahab means? It's pride. It's proud. It's boisterous. It's tempestuous, stormy, loud. You have Rahab the prostitute, Rahab the harlot. Think about this woman. She tried to get her way. She tried to get what she could out of men with her body. She's a prostitute. That's what we're being told. Rahab is a derogatory name. It was a name that was given to Egypt. "Egypt's help is worthless and empty, therefore I have called her Rahab who sits still." In Isaiah, we find this name Rahab is given to Egypt. It's not a nice name. It conjures an image not of a noble woman, not of a princess like Sarah. It's a loud, stormy, tempestuous prostitute who gets what she can out of men with her body. That's the picture. Just Rahab the prostitute.

Third observation is I recognize that the technical name, the formal name of Israel or being an Israelite really wasn't introduced until the days of Jacob. But you know what's interesting about all the people listed here? Even the guys that get honorable mention in v. 32? They're all considered Jews. They're all considered in the line. These are all people who would be recognized by Jews as having this godly heritage. All of them. You follow through. Who do you have here? You have Abraham and you have Sarah and you have Isaac and you have Jacob. You just flow through here. You have Moses. Then you think of the honorable mentions. You have judges and kings and prophets. But what's interesting is she's like the only one that stands out as clearly just being a pagan. Just clearly being a Gentile. The only one. Heathen. That's the picture you have. A pagan. You remember how Paul and Peter - Paul's speaking to

Peter there in Galatians - he says you know, Peter, you and I, we're Jews. We're not like these Gentile sinners. Well, he wasn't saying that Jews didn't have sin. He goes on right after that to say, look, we're all justified by faith.

But isn't it interesting? We're not like them. Gentile sinners. What does that mean? Gentile sinners. It means that they're sinners of a special and unique category. And isn't that what we saw about the Amorites? The Amorites are an especially wicked people, abominable practices of these nations. God says He's going to come in and He's going to wipe them all out. Do you remember how He talked to Abraham? The sin of the Amorites is not yet full. We're going to have four generations here and then we're going to come and wipe these out because their sin is going to be full. These people with all their practices. God says, I detested them. Their practices are horrible. They did all manner of abominable things. And Rahab. Who is she? She's every bit of the stock of these Gentile sinners. It is interesting to me that when the spies visit Jericho and Rahab hides them and she pleads for her life to be spared, listen to what she says. "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 alive my father and mother, my brother and sisters, and all who belong to them and deliver our lives from death." And you know when they came in there and the spies went up and the walls had fallen down? Her whole family was saved. You know what? I'm assuming that most young ladies who become prostitutes are a shame to their parents. Certainly in Israel that would have been the case. And I'm assuming that in our lives and our families that that would be the case as well. But you know what's interesting? It seems like you get the feeling here that her parents were not somehow at a distance from her. They were not cut off. They were not separated. You get kind of the idea that maybe they accepted her wicked lifestyle. Why? Well, because they're Gentile sinners. All these abominable practices that characterized Jericho, characterized them. This was the reason that God was sending Israel to go in there and destroy them. All this kind of wickedness.

Perhaps you'll remember that God said their sin is not full yet, but why is Joshua coming? Because their sin is full. It's come up to this measure. They are Gentile sinners. There is wickedness. She's a prostitute. It doesn't seem like she's alienated from her family. But Joshua bearing down on Jericho. The Amorites sin is full. And it just seems like Rahab and her family, they seem just as debauched as the rest of them. Ripe for the slaughter. In so many ways, Rahab seems to be so unlike the other people in this list. And yet it's interesting, the author of Hebrews is not out of time until he gets there.

Now, just another observation. You look here. In v. 30, "By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for 7 days. By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies." V. 30 - let's just compare these two verses. Before we compared Sarah and Rahab. Let's just compare Joshua and Rahab. In v. 30 we have Joshua leading the ranks of Israel. Can you see Joshua? Great man of faith. And this guy, he and Caleb - yeah, we may look like grasshoppers in their sight and our sight and everybody's sight, but we're going to go in there. God is with us. We can do it. Great man of faith. And always leading the Israelites and they're circling Jericho - the city where Rahab and her family are just hiding out. Think of the contrast between Joshua and Rahab. Joshua is a mighty man of God. He's the leader. The baton has been handed to him

from Moses. He leads the armies of the Most High. He's gallant. He believed Israel empowered by God would have victory over all their enemies in Canaan. God is with him. God has put a measure of what Moses had upon him. He's a man. Rahab is a woman. Joshua is a descendant of Abraham. He's a descendant of Jacob. He's a descendant of Joseph. Who is Rahab descended from? Just a bunch of pagan Gentile sinners. Not a noble race at all. Just this cursed, sin-laden Amorites. Joshua's name means "Savior." Same name that our Lord had. Her name? We already looked at that. Proud, arrogant. Joshua is a leader, successor. Rahab, a prostitute. You think about this. He's leading the ranks of Israel. The only thing that she seems to have led in is debauchery.

Brethren, you think about what sort of sin - I was thinking as I was sitting down there earlier. I grew up in Michigan and I'm probably known by some of the friends that I ran around with in high school and college - I'm probably still known among some of them for some of the sins that were notorious in my life. 3500 years later, her being a prostitute has stuck with her. She's in this city that's about to know the wrath of God. And you know, as we go through all of this, for all this disparity, for all the differences, for all the dissimilarity between Rahab and Joshua and all the rest of the folks here in chapter 11, you know what, at the end of the day, they're all in the same list. Rahab is so different in so many ways, but you know what? Rahab has the one and only thing in common with all the rest that really matters. It's the one thing necessary. It's the one thing that matters above all else. They believed that the Lord God was a great God, a powerful God, their faith was in Him. You look at her life. I'm trying to think about this. The author of Hebrews is trying to encourage us. And I'm looking at this woman and she still has that title on there. A woman that I don't know, what? Is so shockingly wicked that people still call you a prostitute after 3500 years? A woman whose name is proud and arrogant over against a princess? A woman whose name is proud and boisterous over against Joshua? Over against these others? A true pagan. And it's like this author will not quit in this list until he puts her here.

Now you listen to her. Listen to Rahab. You don't need to turn here. "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.' Then 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 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 do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will 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." Now you think about this. Why would she do this? Why was she risking her life? You know what? If the king had found those two men, what do you think he would have done to her? He likely would have killed them and her. She was a traitor. Why would she do this? Listen to her. In Joshua 2:8, don't turn there, but listen. "Before the men lay 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 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. 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 alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them and deliver our lives from death."

Think about it. I know that the Lord has given you the land. You think for a second about Israel. Oh, I know we might figure that they numbered a bunch of them. But you think about who they are. They came out of Egypt as slaves. They've wandered around for 40 years because they rebelled. Wandered around out there. A whole generation has fallen dead. They don't come with great war machines. They don't come with chariots. (incomplete thought) Who are they? They're out there. They've basically been nomads for the last 40 years. They've wandered around out there. They're not coming in with any mighty military engine. We're a walled city. We've got big walls all the way around us. Not easily breached. Well defended. Do you see what she puts at stake here? See what she does? She says, "I know the Lord has given you the land." Humanly speaking, the Israelites didn't have a hope, and yet, what's Rahab doing? She is staking her life, her future, on the fact that what she had heard about the Lord was true and that He was indeed the true God and a God to be feared and a God that was going to give them victory. (excuse me) She believed that. She believed. Even though those walls - those walls, listen, walls defended a city. Those walls were still standing. She could see them. They were something physical for her to look at. Where was this God? She couldn't see Him. But she trusted. She put her confidence there. She had heard and she believed that He was the true God and that He was to be feared and that He was the safest place that she could be - not to run; not to hide; not to stay behind her walls, but that that God of the Israelites was the safest place for her to be. That's what she staked everything on. Not to fight against Him. Not to run from Him. But to surrender to Him and to hope in Him for mercy. She staked everything on that. Everything.

Brethren, what do we find here? Staking our lives upon the true Joshua; upon Jesus Christ. I come to this and what I found as I'm going through this - Rahab the prostitute - at first I didn't like it. At first, I was upset that was there. Kind of like what we all felt when I'm talking about walking in: John the Adulterer. It's like, what? I felt like that. This is a sister that the Lord has shed His blood for who is in glory right now. Author of Hebrews, what gives? He specifically says in this letter he wants to encourage us. And I'm thinking, you know what? He didn't put that in there to discourage us. He put that in there to encourage us. And I thought okay, where is the encouragement?

Brethren, the encouragement. What the author is telling us is you may be an outsider in so many ways. You may have a bad name. You may have sin in your life that is still pinned to you to this day and it hasn't been 3500 years. For me it's been 25, and I know - I know there are people that are alive that know me by the sins that I did. You may not come from the right family. You may not from the right lineage. You may not come from the right background. You may have all manner of names that are pinned to you. You may not in this world's eyes be accepted. You may be like this woman. You're just an outsider in every way imaginable. You've got sin pegged

to you. There's not much noble about you. You're not a Sarah. Your sin's so shocking that it's been pinned to you. But here's what's being said to us. I felt like the author of Hebrews just wanted to make sure: before I'm done, I'm bringing Rahab in and I'm pinning that name on her. And she is really special in a lot of different ways here. She is singular as being the only one whose sin is brought out. Singular in just the pagan background. But what he's telling us, if you will seek shelter under the wings of the Lord God, you're in. You're in. It's yours. Oh, he invites you to come and take shelter in Him. By faith, you too will be added to the list of the worthies. "Of whom the world is not worthy." The world is not worthy of Rahab the prostitute. What grace of God to count us worthy! Rahab the harlot is counted worthy! And you start really looking at this and reflecting on yourself, and you suddenly find this isn't something to get angry about. This is something that is absolutely glorious and hope-giving! That He would put this Gentile sinner, an Amorite of Jericho in here.

Oh, brethren... again, I go back to what I was thinking about in John 5 - Jesus saying, "I say these things to you that you might be saved." And I think back on the message that we heard in the first hour. And it's: yes, God is sovereign, and yet, isn't it amazing in His sovereignty, He gives us Rahab the harlot in the list of worthies of Hebrews 11. Why? I believe for the same reason. "I say these things that you might be saved." I say these things to encourage you. I say these things to you because if you think you're an outsider, what hope is there for me? I'm just an outsider! You don't know the things that I've done! Yeah, but you know the things that Rahab did because that was left in there. Even if you're the one person who for whatever reason - you could feel like, Lord, I don't have the privileges that other people have. I don't have what they had. Why am I the person singled out? Why did this happen or that happen? Or why is this true? Why do I get the name "harlot," "prostitute" tagged on my name? Why am I that person? Yet if the one thing that matters, you've taken shelter under His wing, you're in. You're in. You're one of the people of faith. And he doesn't just say her in passing. It's like I really believe he meant I'm going to get there and deal with her specifically before I'm out of time. Because that's going to encourage somebody. I think that. I think that's why that is there. Oh brethren, what hope-giving! What hope-giving, to be on the outside and Christ just beckoning. And all your outsideness, and all your differentness, and all your heinous sin that has you labeled; when you're not in that line, you're not related to Abraham... Look what happens. This is the kind of God we have. Rahab the harlot, let's bring you in and make you the mother of Boaz. Let's put you in the Messianic line. Let's show what the kindness of God does. Oh brethren, what kind of God do we have to take Rahab the harlots and to make them worthy by the blood of Jesus Christ? To me, that's just tremendously hope-giving that that's in there.

Father, we thank You that You save sinners. We thank You for Your kindness, Lord, saving people such as us. Oh Lord, we hardly know what to say. What language shall we borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend? But we do thank You in Christ's name, Amen.