



MIRACLE ON THE WALL

WEEK 1
12.03.17

FOCUS VERSE

Psalm 111:10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

LESSON TEXT

Joshua 2:8–21

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

14 And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

16 And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

17 And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

18 Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

19 And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.

20 And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.

21 And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Frightening fear can lead to anxiety and depression; however, the saving fear of God can be a path to great miracles.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Contagious Fear

In his article “Anxiety: 10 New Psychology Studies You Should Know,” Jerry Dean reported psychologists have found that “anxiety makes people focus more on themselves” (*PsyBlog*, accessed September 2016). It is no wonder people battling fear and anxiety become mentally paralyzed and unable to see any hope on the horizon.

Have you ever felt the paralyzing effects of fear? Have you ever come face-to-face with a situation that produced panic? If you are a parent, perhaps you know that terrifying feeling when, in a public place, you realize your little child is no longer walking at your side. While you hastily scan the crowd, panic sets in. You fear she may have been kidnapped. Sadly, there are cases where children have been abducted, but the majority of the time, the child is safe—just misplaced. But

fear almost always jumps to the wrong conclusions.

In contrast, the Scriptures offer us access to faith that can overcome our fears. The psalmist wrote, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1).

As former US President Franklin Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself.” Why? Because psychologists tell us that fear is contagious! When someone expresses fear and worry, others who hear those concerns may find themselves buying into the fear, thus adopting the anxious mindset. The good news is that not only is fear contagious, but so is faith. “And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

OUTLINE

I. RAHAB

- A. A Woman of Faith
- B. A Woman of Courage
- C. Recognized God’s Plan
- D. Expressed Fear of God

II. RAHAB’S FAITH IN MOTION

- A. Hid the Spies
- B. Made Agreement with the Spies
- C. Helped Spies Escape
- D. Brought Her Family to Safety

III. RAHAB’S MIRACLE

- A. Wall Fell
- B. One House Stood
- C. Her Obedience Honored

IV. RAHAB’S LASTING INFLUENCE

- A. Ancestor of Boaz, David, and Jesus
- B. Testimony of God’s Grace

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Fear is an emotion that few adults desire to disclose to others. If we do share our fears

with a family member, friend, or counselor, we will often use terms such as “anxiety” or “stress” that do not carry the same shameful feelings that admitting fear can bring. And yet statistics demonstrate that anxiety is the most common mental health ailment in America, with 18 percent of the adult population affected (National Institute of Mental Health). In other words, almost one out of every five people are living in fear, sometimes even debilitating fear. Job performance, relationships, spirituality, ministries, and even physical health can be negatively impacted by fear. For many that experience fear on a regular basis, the resulting inability for healthy life functioning then converts into depression when life seems unmanageable, a downward cycle that robs a person of the joy God desires for each of us.

Fear, however, is a natural human emotion. Our minds and bodies are designed to react to fearful situations by pumping more blood to our extremities and increasing the production of adrenaline and other hormones to enhance our bodies’ ability to fight or run

from a dangerous situation. Therefore, one could conclude that God instilled the ability to fear within us in order to protect us.

This protective response of fear illuminates our understanding of what it means to fear God. Whether we find ourselves mired in sin that is destroying our lives or face danger from an imminent threat to our physical bodies, we fear His awesome power and “otherness” while recognizing that He alone can save us. When we trust God and act on our faith, we receive assurance promised in His Word: “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid . . . for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Deuteronomy 31:6). In this lesson, be encouraged to fear the Lord instead of fearing your circumstance, allowing His miraculous power and protection to save and change your life.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. RAHAB

A. A Woman of Faith

Joshua 2 introduces us to an unlikely hero in the story of Israel, a female prostitute named Rahab. Little is known about Rahab, except for her extraordinary faith in a God mostly unknown to her and worshiped by a people she had never met. A resident of the city of Jericho, the first Canaanite city to fall under Israelite conquest, Rahab recognized the superiority and faithfulness of Jehovah as He provided victory and provision for His people Israel.

Over one thousand years later, the writer of Hebrews celebrated Rahab by including her in the heroes of faith: “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace” (Hebrews 11:31). The contrast in this verse is unmistakable, as the writer indicates that the annihilation of Jericho was due to unbelief, while Rahab’s salvation was due to her faith. Jericho would have lost their sovereignty to Israel due to God enacting His covenant with Israel, but the sober implication of this verse is that the entire population of Jericho might have been saved had they responded to the Lord as Rahab did. She learned firsthand the

saving faith of God, and ultimately she and her family escaped His devastating judgment of their city.

In our connected world of competing belief systems, it is possible to find ourselves considering our faith as one of many “truths” instead of the truth. Rahab lived in a city and region that worshiped only other gods, yet she placed her faith in the God of Israel. She believed in the true God even though her neighbors and friends did not. The writer of Proverbs declared: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

As men and women of faith, may we trust God wholeheartedly with our lives.

B. A Woman of Courage

Rahab’s faith was not limited to mental assent that God exists, but her trust in God spurred her to action to help facilitate His will. Rahab risked her life, and perhaps even the lives of her family, in order to provide shelter and safety to the two men Joshua sent to spy on the city. In order to save these men, Rahab hid them in her home and deceived the king of Jericho into believing that they had already left the city. Given the fear of Israel’s conquest of the city (Joshua 2:9), the king of Jericho would not have tolerated Rahab’s betrayal, likely resulting in her execution had she been caught.

Rahab’s courage was also on display in her negotiation with the two Israelite spies. Rahab agreed to risk her life to save the spies only if they would guarantee the safety of her and her family from the coming Israelite invasion. Her faith that God would provide Israel an absolute victory over the inhabitants of Jericho motivated her to boldly act to help provide the safety of both the Israelite spies and her family.

James 2:17 states, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead.” Therefore, it is by faith that we are obedient to the gospel and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. In this same manner, Rahab demonstrated faith by taking action. We see this in her boldness with the king of Jericho and the spies. Her act of faith resulted in (1) two spies safely returning to the Israelite camp and (2) the salvation

of her and her family. Today, our salvation starts with our faith and is perfected through obedience to God's Word.

C. Recognized God's Plan

Citing the destruction of Israel's enemies by God's hand, Rahab demonstrated a recognition of His plans for the destruction of Jericho. Joshua records how she informed the spies: "I know that the LORD hath given you the land. . . . for we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed" (Joshua 2:9–10). By displaying her knowledge of God's plan and relaying the fear that had gripped the city because of Israel's victories, Rahab provided the two spies with the vital military intelligence they needed. Because of this, Joshua could be confident that both Israel and the inhabitants believed God had given them the city.

This awareness contrasts greatly with the last spying expedition into Canaan, in which Moses sent twelve spies to scout the cities and their fortifications (Numbers 13). All the spies except Joshua and Caleb reported that God's plan for Israel to conquer Canaan could not be executed. Telling the Israelites that "we were in our own sight like grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Numbers 13:33), the spies convinced the people with their majority report that God's plan was impossible. The outcome of their nation's disobedience was God's punishment of forty years of wandering in the wilderness. (See Numbers 14.)

This time, however, Rahab provided confirmation that not only did she recognize God's plan, but also the entire city recognized their danger and were fearful of Israel. Regardless of the strength of Jericho's fortifications and the military might of their army, the spies returned to Joshua stating, "Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us" (Joshua 2:24).

In I Corinthians 2:9–10, Paul quoted the prophet Isaiah: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered

into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." God has wonderful things planned for each of our lives that we could not fathom, but only discern through receiving His Spirit and trusting Him. While God revealed His plans of destruction to Rahab, every day He reveals His plans of reconstruction in our heart and lives.

D. Expressed Fear of God

What distinguished Rahab from the rest of the people of Jericho was her fear, or reverence, of God. The people of Jericho also demonstrated fear, but their fear was not rooted in God but in their circumstance: an undefeated army was coming their way. Rahab also confessed to being afraid of the Israelite army. But instead of remaining faint-hearted like her fellow citizens, she feared God rather than her circumstances. Rahab told the spies, "And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11). Rahab's sweeping declaration of God's power "in heaven above, and in earth beneath" mirrors how God revealed Himself to His own people (Deuteronomy 4:39). Her reverence for God resulted in a miraculous provision for her and her family: the only survivors of their city's destruction.

The psalmist declared: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Psalm 111:10). When we stand in awe of the incredible power and vastness of God, recognizing our need to obey His mission for our lives, we are then equipped to grow in knowledge and wisdom needed to improve our lives.

So often we face a difficult challenge in our lives, such as the death of a loved one or the loss of a job, and allow fear and anxiety to overcome us. We ask ourselves how we will survive or how we can go on without our loved one. Yet, when we consider the greatness of God and His will that He desires to be accomplished in us, we know His hand

will protect us. Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:33–34, NKJV). God will protect us and provide what we need when we place Him first in our lives. This assurance calms our fear, increases our wisdom, and allows us to move forward through our circumstances.

II. RAHAB’S FAITH IN MOTION

A. Hid the Spies

Joshua sent two men in a covert operation to spy on the Canaanite land and specifically the city of Jericho in preparation for an invasion. Unfortunately, the king of Jericho was notified that the Israelite spies had infiltrated their city soon after their arrival. Given the great fear of Israel in the city, the citizens of Jericho were likely hypervigilant in seeking to protect their welfare. For the spies, their early discovery placed their lives and the success of the mission in jeopardy.

The spies entered the house of Rahab, likely a local meeting place, inn, or even tavern for travelers and residents alike. The public use of her home and the transient nature of visitors probably helped support her livelihood as a prostitute. While the fact that two God-fearing Israelite men entered her home and slept there may raise eyebrows for the modern reader, the Scriptures themselves bear no indication that sexual immorality occurred.

When summoned by the king to bring out the men, Rahab instead hid the men on her roof in stalks of flax. She then deceived the king, telling him: “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.” (Joshua 2:4–5, NKJV). While her actions may raise ethical and even moral questions, Rahab’s deception was not to protect or distort the truth about herself, but the two Israelites in her care. Rahab used falsehood to save the lives of the Israelites and facilitate God’s

will for the city of Jericho.

As Christian believers, we must always seek to tell the truth (Proverbs 12:19) and not seek to deceive (Ephesians 4:25), but recognize that there may be rare situations when telling the truth could cause unjust harm to others. Christian ethicists have often used the example of World War II era Germans hiding Jews in their basement from the Nazi officials, telling lies to the Nazis to keep the Jews in their care safe. The ethical question is then asked in this scenario: is it better to deceive the Nazis and save the Jews, or tell the truth to the Nazis and facilitate Jews being sent to their deaths in a concentration camp? The nature of this ethical dilemma is also present in the story of Rahab. Furthermore, the fact the king of Jericho trusted Rahab’s deception indicates that she likely had a reputation of being honest and trustworthy in her relationships with others in the city. May we as Christians also have a reputation for trustworthiness, so that God may use our relationships with others to facilitate His will.

B. Made Agreement with the Spies

Rahab pointed out her kindness to the spies in providing protection, and in return she asked them to provide her and her family with kindness in providing protection when Israel conquered Jericho. She specifically asked the spies to swear an oath that her immediate family be spared from death, along with all of their servants. The spies respond by stating, “our life for yours,” and told her that as long as she did not betray them, they would show kindness to her and her family and protect them when they took the city. (See Joshua 2:14.)

One of the challenges of this agreement is God’s prohibition of treaties with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:1–2). Israel was commanded to utterly destroy Canaanite cities in totality, and would later encounter problems due to disobedience of this command. Rahab, however, demonstrated by her faith in God that she was not a “true Canaanite,” but instead had already converted to the Hebrew faith and was an Israelite at heart. Therefore, the treaty these spies made was with a woman of like faith, not an idolatrous Canaanite.

C. Helped the Spies Escape

Since Rahab's house was on the outer wall of Jericho, she facilitated the spies' escape from the city by using a rope to let them down from a window along the wall. She gave them instructions to go to the hills and hide there for three days until their pursuers returned to Jericho. The spies went down the rope and followed Rahab's instructions, hiding out in the hills for three days. After watching the officials from Jericho return to the city, they then left the hills, crossed the Jordan River, and reported back to Joshua the good news that the Lord had delivered the city into their hands.

D. Brought Her Family to Safety

Before the spies escaped, they instructed Rahab to tie a scarlet cord in the window and to bring all of her family members into her house. Any family members who ventured outside of her home would place their lives at risk. Reminiscent of the Passover in Egypt when the Israelites were instructed to place the lamb's blood on their doorposts to protect their firstborn from death, the scarlet cord in the window would protect Rahab's family from the destruction coming to their city. Rahab obediently tied the scarlet cord in the window and waited for her deliverance.

III. RAHAB'S MIRACLE

A. Wall Fell

Under the command of the Lord, Joshua and his fighting men marched around the city of Jericho once each day for seven days, along with priests blowing seven trumpets and carrying the Ark of the Covenant. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times. After the final march, the trumpets sounded a long blast, the people shouted, and the wall of Jericho came down. The armed men marched straight into the city and destroyed every living thing: men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys. Only Rahab and her family were spared as the spies had promised. The Israelite fighting men burned the city, and Joshua proclaimed a curse on anyone who would seek to rebuild.

God's command to utterly destroy every living thing in the city, including non-military

women, children, and animals, is difficult for our modern sensibilities to understand. In the tragic world in which we live, genocide is only committed by dictators and evil leaders, and we pray for peace and safety for those who live under tyranny. How can we reconcile God's command and active role in the destruction of this city? We learn from Scripture that God used Israel as an instrument of His justice, exacting His judgment upon Jericho and the rest of the Canaanites for their detestable sins (Leviticus 18:24–28, 20:22–24). God abhorred the Canaanites for their sin, and He punished them by causing their destruction and giving their land to Israel. God then promised Israel that He would bless and protect them in Canaan, but if they engaged in unrepentant sin, then the land would “vomit them out” as well. (See Leviticus 20:22.)

B. One House Stood

Rahab and her family were spared from the destruction of Jericho. Joshua had instructed the two spies to go to Rahab's house and bring her out along with her family. At first they were allowed to stay outside the camp of Israel, but later they were allowed to live among the Israelites (Joshua 6:23, 25).

It is difficult to imagine the traumatic experience this family faced as their city was destroyed just outside their door. Certainly the cries and screams of people perishing were overwhelming. For the time the battle was raging, Rahab's faith was certainly challenged. Would the spies remember their oath? Or would her door come open and violence enter with it? And yet through it all, God honored Israel's promise to her. Her salvation was complete.

In our modern world of convenience, medical technology, and humanistic optimism, it can be most fearful when we encounter a problem that renders us helpless. The doctors do not have an easy cure, the attorneys are not optimistic about our case, the addiction seems impossible to break, and the police are unable to keep us safe. When our world seems to be falling apart, it is easy for that fear to convert into depression, telling us our lives are hopeless. We can allow guilt from decisions that may have led to this circumstance destroy us from within. In these

moments, we can call on the name of Jesus Christ and experience his miraculous peace (Philippians 4:7). His salvation is perfect, and we can feel confident that He will protect our lives from destruction when we place our trust in Him. Our hope is an eternity with Him.

C. Her Obedience Honored

We often consider Rahab's actions in hiding the two spies as her key actions of faith. Her obedience to the oath she made with the spies, however, specifically in telling no one about Israel's plans to conquer the city, was critical to the success of the mission. Rahab's protection of the spies was a one-time event, but Rahab's protection of their secret lasted days until the invasion was complete. Inhabitants of the city may have wondered about the scarlet cord hanging from her window, but she managed to protect its unique purpose in bringing salvation to her house.

IV. RAHAB'S LASTING INFLUENCE

A. Ancestor of Boaz, David, and Jesus

The Gospel of Matthew opens with a genealogy that ends with Jesus Christ. Included in the listing of names is Rahab, who married Salmon (Matthew 1:5), a man possibly a relative of faithful Israelite hero Caleb. Salmon and Rahab had a son Boaz, who married Ruth after seeing her working in his fields (Matthew 1:5; Ruth 2:3–6). Two generations later, King David was born, and nearly a thousand years after that, Jesus Christ. Rahab, who was not an Israelite, became part of the royal lineage of David and the Messiah through her incredible faith in God.

B. Testimony of God's Grace

Rahab's actions made a lasting impact on Israel, resulting in a celebrated legacy. In addition to her being declared righteous in the "heroes of faith" listed in Hebrews 11, James also included her as an example of someone whose faith and obedience led to her salvation: "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:25–26, NKJV). The New

Testament's inclusion of Rahab as an example of faith and obedience reflects her Jewish legacy and special place among the people of Israel. Known as "Rahab the Harlot," she maintains a witness that God's plan and purpose is not dependent on a perfect life, but on reverence and obedience to Him.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Our culture is always looking for a hero to celebrate. Whether an athlete, movie star, musician, millionaire, author, politician, or first responder, heroes instill hope that a human being can overcome a challenge and achieve success. But what happens when internally we do not believe we can ever be successful, let alone be a hero?

Psychologists have coined a term *learned helplessness*, which occurs when an individual experiences inescapable, challenging circumstances over and over again to the point where they stop believing salvation from their problem is possible. The persistence of fear, day after day, wears human beings down until they grow tired, sick, and depressed. Eventually they give up hope that their lives will ever improve or even be manageable.

Within each of us, however, is the capability to be a hero. Perhaps not a hero that is celebrated on the news, but a hero whose actions result in the salvation of our lives as well as the lives of our family members and friends. Rahab, a prostitute-turned-hero, saved herself, her family, and two men simply because she feared the one true God. What if we believed that God was for us (Romans 8:31)? What if we acted on our faith and took bold action to rally the social support, church family, and professional resources we need to rise above our circumstances?

Rahab's life forever changed on the day the grace of God in the form of two Israelite spies walked into her house. Because she saw her opportunity for salvation from fear and boldly took action, she has been remembered as a hero for over three thousand years. May we all be willing to see the opportunities of grace provided to us and have the courage to act on them. May our fear of God help us to see His grace at work in our lives and to walk in the hope He has established for us. ■

REFLECTIONS

- Rahab was the matriarch for generations of faithful believers, including kings of Israel and the King of kings. What hero of faith in your family introduced others, including you, to Jesus Christ? Can you trace your lineage of faith? Are you yourself a faithful hero for future generations?
- Are you experiencing anxious (fearful, worrisome) or depressive (sad, hopeless) feelings now? Who has graciously walked into your life that could provide help and support? Your pastor, a family member, friend, doctor, or counselor? Will you courageously take action to receive the grace of God through them?
- Rahab was a prostitute when her opportunity for salvation came. Mired in sexual immorality, her faith not only saved her life but led to a life of righteousness including marriage, children, and a legacy of faith. What sins have you committed that you believe hold you back from God fulfilling his plan in your life? What do you think Rahab would tell you if she were alive today?
- What does “fearing God” look and feel like to you? Is it reverence, respect, even literal fear? Is it obedience, faithfulness, even love? How might our relational view of God impact our ability to respond to His grace? How could your relational view of God change through prayer?
- Our jobs, schools, and neighborhoods are full of broken people who need miracles. Learned helplessness is an epidemic in our society. How could you be a hero to them? How might you pray with people during outreach events or provide for their physical needs (food, water, medication)? May you be the miracle someone needs to recognize the one true God.