

“Saved Out of Harlotry”

July 8, 2012

Text: James 2:25-26

**There was a song my church sang when I was a boy, which
spoke eloquently of salvation by God’s grace.**

Although we’ve never sung it here, I think you’re prob. familiar
with it.

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou biddest me come to Thee.
O Lamb of God, I come—I come.

There is a beautiful truth in those words=> that I, as a sinner,
don’t have to reform myself before I come to the Lord, to
receive His saving grace.

I can come to Him just as I am—guilt/sin, & all.

But some folks misunderstood that, and mistakenly think, that
means God accepts my sin and my sinfulness.

**I remember a young woman who was waiting in the lobby to
talk to me one Sunday after I had preached, and she
told me that my message disagreed with the message
Jesus taught.**

I must have said something in my sermon about the need to
lead a holy life when one is born again.

She said, “Jesus hung out with sinners and prostitutes,”
implying that He was OK w/ their sinfulness.

It saddened me, because I think she was prob. alluding to herself, possibly even as a prostitute, implying that I was being judgmental toward people like her.

The truth is that, when the woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus, He said=> “*Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on **sin no more***” (Jn 8:11).

He didn’t say, “I’m OK with your sin.”

When the immoral woman in Lk 7 anointed Jesus’ feet with perfume, she also anointed them with her tears.

She was weeping because of the sinful life she too had led, hoping to find in Him release/forgiveness/cleansing from her sin.

He said—“*Her sins, which were many, have been **forgiven***” (Lk 7:37-48).

You cannot be a prostitute and be a Xn.

You can be a Xn peddler, a Xn post-worker, or a Xn paleontologist, but you cannot be a Xn prostitute.

You can, however, be a X who was once a prostitute, but has now been forgiven/redeemed/transformed.

When the H.S. brings a person to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, He brings him with a repentant attitude that has come to hate/abhor his own sin.

He comes hungering/thirsting for righteousness that he knows he doesn’t have.

He comes for “conversion”—a radical redirection of his life from his old sinful ways, towards God’s holy ways.

And when he places his faith in Jesus X to bring that about,
the old things in his life pass away, new things come.

He too can sing wholeheartedly=>

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come—I come!

**In today's text, we meet Rahab—a lady who was converted
and saved out of a life of harlotry/prostitution, to the
ways of the people of God.**

She will become James' 2nd illustration of the principle that faith
which effectually saves, is faith that does good works in
obedience to its Lord.

**Last Sunday we considered James' first OT illustration of
the truth that real saving faith produces acts of
obedience to God=> the life of Abraham.**

We saw that Abraham was justified by his works—not in the
sight of God, whose omniscience can see a person's faith;
But rather, in that of men, who couldn't see the faith in
Abraham's heart, but did see the effects of that faith
on his life and his actions.

We also saw that Abraham's faith was perfected and matured
through his own acts of obedience to the Lord.

We saw that the Scripture, "*ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD,
& IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS
RIGHTEOUSNESS*" was climactically fulfilled
by the old patriarch.

It happened when he, out of his faith, set his mind to
obeying God, & offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice.
And we saw that, because his faith was manifested in such
extreme/active obedience to God, he was called
God's friend.

James summarized the principle learned from Abraham's
example this way in verse 24=> *"You see that a man is
justified by works, and not by faith alone."*

**Now James will add a 2nd OT illustration of this principle=>
the faith of Rahab the harlot.**

Again his purpose will be to show that the faith which
saves from sin—living faith—produces good works.

It doesn't surprise us that James decided to use Abraham as an
example of faith that results in obedient good deeds.

He was a hero of the faith—a living monument to the
nobility of living one's whole life trusting the Lord
and submitting to his will.

Not that Abraham never sinned/erred, but rather that so
much of his life was so exemplary, as a man of God,
a man of faith.

He was an extraordinary believer, a truly upright/godly
man, who lived a consistent/godly life over an
extended period of many years.

He was a noble individual whose life was so consistent w/
his faith that it won him the title *"the friend of God."*

That was a title of great honor.

What does surprise us, however, is that James would then choose Rahab as his 2nd illustration of the good works produced by living faith.

Rahab had been as ignoble as Abraham was noble.

She was forever stigmatized as “Rahab the harlot,” even after she believed in YHWH God, & her life had been transformed.

She was the descendant of a race God had condemned to annihilation because they were so wicked.

And she was considered wicked even by their sinful standards.

But James has intentionally chosen someone at the opposite end of the spectrum from Abraham, just to make his point=>

That, regardless of someone’s background before his conversion, if he/she is saved by faith, good works will always be the outward result of his salvation.

John Calvin=> “He designedly put together two persons so different in their character in order to clearly shew that no one, whatever may be his or her condition, nation, or class in society, has ever been counted righteous w/o good works.”

In addition, James’ choice of Rahab serves to remind us that God is no respecter of persons in His graciously saving sinners.

It reminds us of just how far down the grace of God can/will reach.

The only personal characteristic that matters in the end, is whether/not a person believes unto salvation.

The great chapter on heroes of the faith (Heb 11), lists the names of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses among its heroes, just as we would expect.

But surprisingly, it also lists Rahab in vs 31 of that chapter:

*“By faith **Rahab** the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”*

God’s grace makes faith the great equalizer, which places the name of a converted harlot next to that of a great patriarch, listing them both as spiritual heroes.

Even more surprising, we find Rahab’s name in Mt 1:5 as one of the ancestors of Jesus Christ Himself=>

*“And to Salmon was born Boaz by **Rahab**; and to Boaz was born Obed by Ruth; and to Obed, Jesse; / and to Jesse was born David the king” (1:5-6).*

Rahab the harlot had ended up marrying a nobleman named Salmon, & she became the great-grandmother of King David.

Because Jesus was born of the line of David, Rahab was also one of His ancestors, humanly-speaking.

All of those honors were the result of her faith.

In our text today, James will teach two basic truths=>

- 1) That Rahab was justified by works,**
- 2) That anyone’s faith, without works, is dead (the grand summary of this whole section of James)**

*** Principle #1—Rahab Was Justified by Works**

[James 2:25]=> *“And in the same way [as Abraham] was not Rahab the harlot also **justified by works**, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”*

Let’s begin by reminding ourselves of the story behind

James’ words about Rahab’s life/heroic faith.

We find that story in the OT book of Joshua.

Joshua has just brought the Israelites from the wilderness into the Promised Land for the first time, & now they are about to conquer it.

They are to begin by destroying the city of Jericho.

God has instructed Israel to march around that city once/day for 6 days, & then on the 7th day to march around it 7 times.

He has promised that when they do so, the wall around the city will collapse, leaving its people defenseless.

They follow God’s instructions and Josh 6:21 says=>

“They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.”

Every man/woman/child, & every other living creature they owned in Jericho, was put to death.

Rahab/her-family were the only exceptions, as indicated in verses

22-23=> *“And Joshua said to the two men who had **spied** out the land, ‘Go into the **harlot’s house** and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her.’ / So the young men who were spies went in and*

*brought out **Rahab** and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives, and placed them outside the camp of Israel.”*

Flashback four chapters earlier to Joshua 2, where Joshua had sent 2 men to Jericho beforehand as spies on a reconnaissance mission, to assess the city’s defenses before he launched the attack against it.

Rahab had spotted them, taken them into her house, & told them that she had come to believe in their God, the God of Israel.

Josh 2:9 (Rahab)=> *“I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. / For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. / And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the **LORD your God, He is God** in heaven above and on earth beneath. / Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, / and spare my father and my mother & my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death” (2:9-13).*

This is the historical account to which James is referring when he asks in our own text=> *“Was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”*

But what actually were Rahab’s “good works” that proved she had truly believed in the God of Israel.

What were these works by which she was justified before men?
Not only had she “*received*” the 2 men, she had welcomed them
as “*messengers*” from God, and dealt kindly w/ them.

Heb 11 referred to them as “spies” (which they were), but
James informs us that Rahab considered these men to
be messengers from the true God.

And not only had she “*received*” them, she had then “*sent them out*” (*ekballo*)=> acted w/ energy/urgency to help them
escape, hurrying them along, for their own safety.

In addition, she had sent them out “*by another way.*”

Josh 2:15-16 tell us she sent them to the mountains, the
opposite direction from the road on which they had
come to Jericho.

There the 2 spies could hide from Jericho’s soldiers until
they’d given up looking for them.

Rahab’s confession had acknowledged that Israel’s God was the
true God, & she had come to believe in Him & trust Him.

This faith had led to her justification before God; but also
before men, when she protected the spies as an
outward act of obedience to their (and now her) God.

The imputed righteousness which comes by living faith had
resulted in her acts of practical righteousness.

If she had been discovered by her own people, she would
undoubtedly have been executed on the spot.

So like Abraham, she had put everything on the line, as she acted out of her faith in God.

Back in Joshua 2, we also discover that Jericho's king had learned about Rahab's taking in the 2 Israelite men.

When he sent soldiers to her house to arrest them, Rahab hid them in a pile of flax on her roof.

Flax is a plant whose fibers, when dried as Rahab was drying them, could be used in the making of linen.

When questioned by the soldiers, Rahab had lied, saying that she didn't know the 2 men were Israelites, and that they had left the city before the city gate was closed that night.

In reality, because her house was built on top the city wall, she had lowered them down from a window, enabling them to escape over the wall without being detected.

Was it wrong for Rahab to lie like that?

Absolutely! But remember, she was a brand-new, untaught believer, from a city where everyone lied, and the better one could lie, the smarter was thought to be.

Before the 2 spies left, they had promised Rahab that if she would hang a scarlet rope out that same window they escaped through, they'd see to it that no harm came to her, or anyone else in her house, when Israel invaded her city.

Rahab had been justified by works when she acted so courageously/decisively to protect the 2 Israelite spies.

James now states the final conclusion to be drawn from his two illustrations—the faith of Abraham/Rahab.

*** Principle #2—Anyone’s Faith Without Works Is Dead**

(The great overarching principle of chapter 2 in James).

If Abraham’s faith hadn’t survived the test of sacrificing Isaac in obedience to God’s command, it would have been proven to be dead/useless/non-saving faith.

Abraham’s sacrificing Isaac was the culmination of many years of living by his faith in God.

But Rahab was a new believer when she acted heroically on the basis of her faith.

Yet if Rahab’s faith hadn’t been compelling enough to cause her to risk her own life on behalf of the God in whom she claimed to believe, hers too would have been dead/worthless faith.

James makes this point by comparing faith with a human body.

[Verse 26]=> *“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”*

“*Spirit*” represents the vital life-principle that, when divinely imparted to the material body, animates it, giving it life.

“*Spirit*” is linked with “breath” in Scripture.

* E.g. you see it in Gen 2:7—*“The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, & **breathed** into his nostrils the **breath** of life; & man became a living being.*

* You see it also in Lk 23:46=> *“Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, INTO THY HANDS I*

COMMIT MY SPIRIT. ' And having said this, He
breathed His last. "

What James wants us to understand is that apart, from the
God-given spirit w/i a body, it's just a pile of dead/lifeless
chemicals (regardless of what evolution teaches).

**Faith that does not produce good works in obedience to
its Creator, is just as dead/lifeless as a corpse.**

Faith that trades on God's grace, living in total disregard of His
will, His commands, and His Word, is the faith of someone
who is still spiritually dead.

He may claim to be born again, and may sincerely believe
that he is, but the evidence of his life says he isn't.

There is an inescapable spiritual law=> True/saving faith
will always manifest its existence in active obedience
to God's Word.

That law is true of those who believe for years (Abraham).

But it's also true of new believers (e.g. Rahab).

No concern for such obedience, means no saving faith and thus
no spiritual life.

That is the kind of dead faith Jesus was describing when He
said=> *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,'
will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who **does**
the will of My Father who is in heaven"* (Mt 7:21).

Dead faith is worse than no faith at all, just as a corpse is worse
than a bronze statue of man's body.

The corpse produces stench/disease as it rots.

The statue doesn't.

James' readers had a Jewish background, so they knew that

having any contact with a corpse made one unclean.

Dead faith was to be avoided, just like a dead body.

**** Dead faith in the Xn creed that doesn't change a man's lifestyle/character is more damning than total ignorance of the truth.**

Jesus said=> *“That slave who knew his master's will & **did not** get ready or **act in accord** with his will, shall receive many lashes, / but the one who did not know it, & committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required”* (Lk 12:47f).

Rahab's faith, not being dead faith, teaches us some key truths about the nature of true/living faith.

1st, living faith gladly receives whatever truth it has.

Rahab hadn't been taught much about Israel's God, but she wholeheartedly embraced what little truth she did have.

We love to see children become believers who have come from Xns homes, whose parents have taught and admonished them in the Word, prayed for them, & provided godly examples for them to follow.

The Spirit can use all these spiritual advantages to draw such children into a saving relationship w/ Jesus X.

But Rahab had no such advantages—no Scripture texts, & no prophets coming to preach repentance in Jericho. Instead, she was surrounded by an entire city so vile that God was going to destroy everyone in it. What little information she had about Israel's God came from rumors about His delivering Israel from Pharaoh, & 2 other kings of its enemies. Rahab's neighbors had that exact same information she had, but they'd merely reacted to it w/ terrified resistance against God/His-people. She, by contrast, had concluded—quite reasonably—that a God who could do such things for a nation that was on its way to her doorstep, was a God she should believe in, surrender-to, and obey.

She didn't have much of the truth, but she wholeheartedly, gladly believed in whatever truth she had, embracing it by faith.

Many people today have God's whole book of revelation to contemplate at their leisure, but they don't believe it. They have believers imploring them to believe it, and find life for their restless/weary souls—but they don't believe.

What will their excuse be on the Day of Judgment,
when the life of Rahab, who had so little upon
which to rest her faith, testifies against them?
2nd, living faith is an inexplicable gift of God's grace.
Rahab was the only person in Jericho called to salvation.
And she was the worst of the worst—the last person
there we'd have expected to believe in God.
Rahab got no encouragement to believe from her neighbors
in Jericho.
But that's where her faith grew nonetheless, like a
flower on a dunghill, bringing great glory to
God's name.
Such converts are not like hothouse plants, but like flowers
that grow in the wild, exposed to the dry heat of
summer.
And they often become some of the most-beautiful
and strongest Xns.
Xns with the most fervent/immovable convictions.
They know what their faith has saved them from, and
they praise God for it every day.
By God's sovereign/inexplicable grace, His truth lights
upon some of humanity's darkest hearts, bringing life
out of death/darkness/despair.
The Spirit convicts Him of
sin/righteousness/judgment.

He opens blind eyes to the bright glory of the gospel
in the face of Jesus, causing sinners to believe
in Him, praying=>

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind—
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find—
O Lamb of God, I come—I come.

We can only hope/pray that God is silently doing a similar
work among the worst of sinners here in Sedona,
Verde Valley, or wherever you may live.

3rd, living faith acts on whatever truth it has received.

Rahab's faith was active, 1st of all, on a mental level.

She had thought things through, & developed a
theology=> "*The LORD your God, He is God
in heaven above and on earth beneath*"
(Josh 2:11).

Building on that foundational truth, she concluded
that the God of heaven/earth had given her city
to the Israelites, & that she would either have to
change loyalties and citizenship (becoming an
Israelite), or die.

She weighed the value of her citizenship against that
of her life/soul, & she repudiated her allegiance
to her city and its sinfulness.

She disavowed her allegiance to her own king, not
informing him of the spies in his city, plotting
its destruction and his own death.

How would you/I react if they day came when we
had to choose between being a good American,
and being a faithful/obedient Xn?

Rahab must have been at least somewhat conflicted.

She was going to have to turn her back on
everything she had ever known, and
everything she had always been, herself.

True/living faith has to decide between its love for
the Kingdom of God, & its love for this world.

And then it prays=> Just as I am, tho tossed about
W/ many a conflict, many a doubt
Fightings & fears w/i, w/o,
O Lamb of God, I come.

* Rahab's faith also acted decisively, taking the spies into
her home, hiding them under the flax, lowering them
down the wall by the rope, & admonishing them to
flee to the mountains & wait there, until the search
for them was over.

Each of these deeds were life-risking acts of treason,
based on her faith in the God of Israel.

4th, living faith trusts God, in spite of its own sinfulness.

Rahab's past-sin stigmatized her for life, as "the harlot."

If there was anyone in Jericho you might expect God
to be gracious to, it wouldn't have been Rahab.

A rather romantic view of prostitutes has developed in
contemporary secular literature.

It views them as girls who are really good at heart but
have just gotten caught up in a nasty habit.

It's tragically true that some of these women are forced into
prostitution by evil people or terrible circumstances.
But they themselves almost always become
bitter/hardened women.

They're not nice girls, they are hardened inside.

They have to be, just to cope w/ what they're doing
to themselves for the sake of men who don't
really care about them, and feel little more
towards them than guilt.

That's undoubtedly what Rahab was like, & she was still
lying, as her culture had taught her, even after she
had believed in Israel's God.

But God saved her out of harlotry, in spite of her sin,
because she believed in Him.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;

Because Thy promise I believe
O Lamb of God, I come—I come.

“Saved Out of Harlotry”

July 8, 2012

Text: James 2:25-26

1. When the Holy Spirit brings a person to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, he brings him with a repentant attitude that has come to hate and [12 abhor] his own sin.
Jn 8:11; Lk 7:37-38
2. Last Sunday we considered James’ first OT illustration of the truth that real saving faith produces acts of obedience to God: the life of [16 Abraham].
Jms 2:24
3. Now James will add a second OT illustration of this principle: the faith of [12 Rahab] the harlot.
4. Regardless of someone’s background before his conversion, if he/she is saved by faith, good works will always be the outward [14 result] of his salvation.
Heb 11:31; Mt 1:5-6

In our text today, James will teach two basic truths...

*** Principle #1—Rahab Was Justified by Works**
[James 2:25]

5. Joshua has just brought the Israelites into the Promised Land for the first time, and now they are about to [16 conquer] it.
[Josh 6:21, 22-23]
6. Joshua had sent two men to Jericho as spies to assess the city’s defenses before he launched the [14 attack] against it.
[Josh 2:9-13]
7. Rahab’s good works that proved she had truly believed in the God of Israel: She received the two men, and she [20 welcomed] them as messengers from God.
[Josh 2:15-16]
8. Rahab had been justified by works when she acted courageously and decisively to [16 protect] the two Israelite spies.

*** Principle #2—Anyone’s Faith Without Works Is Dead**

[Verse 26]

Gen 2:7; Lk 23:46

9. Faith that does not produce good works in obedience to its Creator is just as [10 dead] and lifeless as a corpse.

Mt 7:21; Lk 12:47-48

Rahab’s faith, not being dead faith, teaches us some key truths about the nature of true, living faith...

* 10. Living faith gladly [18 receives] whatever truth it has.

* 11. Living faith is an inexplicable [10 gift] of God’s grace.

* 12. Living faith [10 acts] on what truth it has received.

Josh 2:11

* 13. Living faith trusts God in spite of its own [22 sinfulness].