

Faith in Action
Week 10: Faith That Saves
Joshua 2

I love a good before and after story. I think it's why I've always enjoyed those home renovation shows. Even as a kid, I remember getting excited when This Old House came on. Or, watching Bob Vila on Home Again. He was Google before Google. If you wanted to know how to do something around the house, you just had to hope that Bob Vila did that same project on his show!

In the early 2000's, shows like Trading Spaces and Extreme Makeover: Home Edition became popular. Followed by Love it Or List It, Property Brothers, Fixer Upper. Now there are hundreds of these shows playing every day. I think it's because all of us love a good before and after story. There's something satisfying about watching something be restored. Fixed up. Made new. In a way, these home renovations shows give us inspiration to look at the drab spaces in our own home and imagine what they could be with some fresh life.

Maybe you've watched a show like that, and when it was over you were like, "You know what this room needs? Shiplap! Like, let's put it everywhere! And pillows. We need more pillows. Lots and lots of pillows until we're drowning in them!" I'm telling you, pillows and glitter are the bane of my existence!

The point is, we're inspired by before and after stories. Stories of transformation. They make us happy for the people who experience them, but they also give us hope that maybe transformation is possible in our own spaces. Maybe transformation is possible in my own life?

Scripture is full of these kinds of before and after stories. People who were one thing, only to have an encounter with the living God and be transformed into something entirely new. Our text today is about a story like that. If you have a Bible or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to Joshua 2.

As we continue our Faith in Action series, we're looking at the life of someone who went through a pretty dramatic before and after story. Today, we're looking at Rahab. And, when parents are thinking of biblical names for their daughter, they choose Hannah, or Mary, or Sarah. They don't typically choose the name Rahab. In fact, I looked. Rahab didn't make the list of "Top 100 Biblical Girl Names for Your Divine Daughter." And I think it's because we typically associate Rahab with her *"before"* story, but we completely forget about the beautiful *"after"* story that God writes in her life.

Some context to Joshua 2. Moses has led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. They have seen God part the Red Sea, bring them victories over their enemies, provide manna from Heaven. And after 40 years of wandering in the desert, it's time for them to take hold of the Promised Land. The land God sent Abraham to in our text from last week. The land where He would establish His nation and they would become His people.

And one of the first cities they come across is a place called Jericho (show picture and keep it up until Josh. 2 passage). I got to visit Jericho a few months ago during my trip to Israel. The city was build up on this type of hill called a Tell. And, we're not talking about a large place here. I think, in all, the circumference of the city is just over a half mile.

It's not a big place, but it was heavily fortified. There was a large wall around the city with strong gates. Once you were inside, there was another inner wall that separated the **commerce area** from the neighborhoods. Where people worked and traded and bartered on the outside, and where people lived on the inside.

So, this is the setting of our text today. Joshua 2, starting in verse 1...(READ Josh. 2:1)

Not a very flattering introduction, right? There were two types of prostitution during this time. One was a ritual prostitution where people engaged in sex acts as a form of worship to pagan fertility gods. That was seen as a respectable, honored career. The other type was what's been called the oldest profession in the world. The transfer of sexual favors for payment of some kind. It was a seedy business looked down upon by others.

And, I think our text gives us a clue as to which one Rahab was. In verse 15, we get this seemingly insignificant detail that the house she lived in was part of the city wall. Do you remember how the city was divided by the two walls? Neighborhoods in the inside wall, commerce within the outside wall. I think it's clear who Rahab was. Her backstory doesn't need a lot of elaboration.

But, the beauty of this text is that we get to see Rahab's renovation play out before us. Verse 2...(READ vs. 2-6)

So here we see Rahab taking some of her first steps of faith, ironically, by telling a lie. But what she's doing in this moment is turning her back on her community. She's turning her back on her old life. She's risking her life to align herself with God and His people. Instead of turning the spies over and trying to save herself, Rahab protects them and lays it all on the line for these two strangers.

Why would she do that? Well, word travels. People in Jericho had heard the stories of what the Lord had done for His people. They knew about the whole thing that had happened at the Red Sea. They'd heard about the other places the Lord had conquered and given to them. And now, the Israelites are coming to knock on their door and they're afraid. Rahab's talking to the spies and she says in verse 11...(READ vs. 11-13)

I love this. Rahab says, "Everyone knows who you are and what your God has done. Everyone knows that the Lord your God is the God of Heaven and Earth." Everyone has the same information about God, but only Rahab responds in faith instead of fear. Only Rahab commits herself into the care and protection of God. Where everyone else had hardened their hearts

against God, Rahab opened hers. She put her new faith into action by hiding the spies and working out a deal to save her family because she understands the power of the Lord.

And so, they devised this plan where Rahab would tie a scarlet cord in the window she let the spies down from. It would be a sign of protection so no one would destroy her home and those in it. Then, when she saw the Israelites coming, she was supposed to gather her entire family together in her home. That way, when they took the city, Rahab and her family would be saved by that scarlet cord.

Some time goes by and the tension in Jericho rises. They've now locked the gates so no one can get in or out. God has Joshua march around the city with his army and a group of priests carrying trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark of the covenant. Remember, it's only a half mile or so around. They do that for 6 days. Marching in silence, raising the tension even more.

On the seventh, they march around the wall seven times. The priests are blowing the horns. When they finish the seventh lap, they give a long blast on the trumpets, the entire army shouts, and the walls collapse. God delivers Jericho to His people, and the Israelites are true to their word. **Joshua 6:25 says...(READ)**

Rahab's before story was a prostitute living on the edges of the city. She was probably cut off from deep community and friendships. Living with the physical and emotional toll of her choices, probably wondering how it all came to this. Wondering if anyone truly loved her or if they just used her. Wondering if she even loved herself.

But, her after story is beautiful. Rahab's faith in the Lord saved her and her family. She became a key player in God's story and a part of His family. She even makes it into the Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11, our anchor text for this series. The author writes **...(READ Heb. 11:31)**

So, as we look at Rahab's renovation story, her before and after, what inspiration can we hold onto as we think about our own life? Our own places and spaces that might need a little transformation of their own? A few things as we close.

First, Rahab's story reminds us that **We're all broken in some way.** Just like Rahab, all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us have something in our past, or that's going on even right now, that we're ashamed of. Don't want others to find out about. We all have places in our life in need of repair or remodeling, or that just need to be completely torn down and started over. We need the love of our Heavenly Father to come in and change us from the inside out. We need new life and a fresh start in our life, or at least in a part of our life.

And for some of us, right now, that just feels impossible. You feel like there's no way God can love you after where you've been or what you've done. There's no way you can change. But, Rahab's renovation story also shows us that **No one is beyond God's grace.** No one!

God never gives up on us, even in those times when we've given up on ourselves. His love keeps pursuing us, keeps drawing us to Himself. His grace is available to everyone, regardless of your background or past mistakes. Listen, God is not embarrassed by you. He's not ashamed of where you've been or what you've done. None of that disqualifies you from his love or makes you beyond the reach of His grace. He wants to pick you up, turn your life around, and set you on a new path.

And, when He does, you get to experience the third takeaway from Rahab's renovation story. **God uses the unlikelyest of people.** How do I know? Because I'm one of them. I know because of how I've seen him use broken, imperfect people...like me, like you, like so many others...to do extraordinary things for His Kingdom.

Tim Thompson and I were talking about this a while back and he's like, "You know, God's standards for who He uses in His story are so much lower than mine would be!" I mean, think about it! God uses a prostitute named Rahab in the story of Israel taking the Promised Land. She could have thwarted the entire thing, but she responds in faith, becomes an ally with God and His people, saving herself and her family.

In the end, she leaves her old life behind and becomes part of a new family; God's family. The next time we read Rahab's name is all the way in Matthew 1:5. Matthew is giving the genealogy of Jesus. And, right there, in his family tree, we find a familiar name...(READ Matt. 1:5-6a)

God uses Rahab to become the Great-great-great grandmother of King David, whose heir would ultimately become Jesus. Jesus came into this world to seek and save those of us who are broken in some way. To offer us forgiveness and a fresh start.

Jesus came to welcome the outcasts, the sinner, and the marginalized to show us that God's grace is available to everyone, regardless of our background or mistakes.

And, just as Rahab's scarlet cord was a sign of protection and salvation, Jesus' blood would run red for us, creating a scarlet cord of God's grace that runs through our lives, marking us with redemption and forgiveness for our sin.

We love a good before and after story. Too often, though, we define ourselves by those moments in our life that we wish we could take back or forget. Too often we feel like who we are today is who we'll always be and we stay stuck in our guilt and shame. We let our past define us and hold us back from the future God desires for us.

But it was Rahab's decision to surrender to God and trust Him that ultimately defined her, not her past. It was her faith in God that saved her. And as we reflect on Rahab's story today, may we be reminded of the power of faith, grace, and the redemption found in Christ alone. Just as Rahab's life was made new through her faith, may we also open our hearts to the saving power of Christ in us and allow Him to use us for His glory.