

People of the Book: Rahab
Joshua 2:1-21; Hebrews 11:30-31
July 4, 2010

She knew it was coming. Everyone in Jericho had heard of the way the God of the Israelites had acted powerfully on their behalf. Now it seemed that those same Israelites were poised to conquer their town of Jericho. What was she to do? In whom would she put her trust – those who governed her town, or the God she had heard so much about?

According to ancient rabbinic teaching, Rahab was considered one of the most beautiful women in the world, the mere mention of her name excited inordinate desire. In the Talmudic literature we are told that Rahab was a harlot. There was, supposedly, not a prince or a ruler that had not had relations with her; and she was therefore well informed of what was going on outside Jericho. She knew what was coming and she knew the characters of those who were in power in her own society.

However, despite the status of the people with whom she fraternized, she was still in a profession that would have caused her to be on the outside of society. She was fully aware, surely, of her place in society and of her spiritual and moral reality. Like all of us, she was a sinner. However, as she considered her life, she must have decided that she wanted something new...something different...and the society in which she lived only seemed to bring out the fallenness in people. Rahab reckoned that a new life would only be found in the God of Israel. As we think about Rahab's life, her faith shines even brighter. She is an outcast, a prostitute. Rejected by society, she still trusts that the Lord will not reject her. Abandoned by her family (we assume) to a life of prostitution, she trusts that the Lord will not abandon her. In rabbinic literature, the conversion of Rahab is regarded by the Rabbis as more complete than that of Jethro and Naaman; for while the latter two did not free themselves entirely from a belief in other gods, Rahab acknowledged that Yahweh was the only God both in heaven and on earth. Rahab has faith not only in what God *has* done, and *can* do, but in faith of what He *will* do for His people and for her. As an act of faith, Rahab makes the decision to separate herself from her people.

She heard what the Lord had done and believed. Too many times we hear what the Lord has done and refuse to believe, or worse, we believe but refuse to act on that belief. Rahab believed *and* acted, even though acting put her life on the line. We often talk about stepping out in faith, but many times that step has little meaning because the drop is small. An abyss awaited Rahab with her first step – the life of a traitor would be short indeed, especially the life of a traitorous harlot.

As we learn from Rahab, we must be honest about who we are spiritually and morally. C. S. Lewis observed, “Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: The proud, the greedy, the self-righteous, are in that danger.” As I look at the society in which we live in this 21st century America, I see many in power who are proud, greedy and self-righteous. They call out a siren song to the undiscerning public to trust in them and in them alone. As a culture are we becoming more like Jericho or more like a society of Rahabs?

How many times a day...a week...do you find that you need to turn to God for your very life’s breath? Or, do you find that you do just fine on your own, and you only think about needing God when life gets tough? Only when we are honest about who we are – individually and as a society –will we find that we are in constant need of Jesus.

As Rahab did with Yahweh, we must come to grips with the reality that our faith in Christ should manifest itself in the choices we make, even if those choices place us out of step with those around us. Life in Christ calls us to be set-apart people...

...set apart from the idols of this world...

...set apart to a new life in which all we do centers on Him...

...set apart to live out our faith in ways that potentially put us at risk in our society.

When you and I look around us, and we find that our culture is degenerating, we have the same choices that Rahab had – to act on behalf of a corrupt and fallen society so that society can be perpetuated; or, to turn toward one who can restore us to righteousness and place our full trust in Him...even to the point of turning that faith into action. What choice will you make?