

FROM THE OLDEST PROFESSION TO A NEW PROFESSION OF FAITH**Joshua 2**

Intro: Last year I read a powerful book entitled *SEEKING ALLAH, FINDING JESUS: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* by Nabeel Qureshi. Qureshi was a Pakistani-American who raised by a devout Muslim family. He too was devout, but there was something stirring in him as he went through the motions of what Islam required. When he went off to college he became fast friends with a Christ Follower named David Wood who was never pushy or obnoxious, but always very open about his relationship with Christ. They had frequent good-natured debates and would often investigate each other's religions by attending the meetings of the other's faith. After several years of this, it became clear that Qureshi's Muslim religion was found wanting and that David's Christianity was real, and, not only that, it was a relationship with the living God. In other words, much more than a mere religion. He converted and became a powerful Christian apologist. He died at the age of 34 in 2017 of stomach cancer, but his impact is still felt in the people he ministered to.

Qureshi was never a wild-eyed Muslim fanatic who attacked and murdered innocents. The truth is most are not. Many Muslims are like Qureshi and his loving parents before him, devout and sincere people, who believe they are on the right path, but are in actuality lost and without hope. He taught the truth that God has a plan for everyone. He has a plan for you and me, for Muslims (wild-eyed fanatics too!), Hindus, Atheists, EVERYONE! That plan is explained in Peter's words, *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* 2 Peter 3:9. Our God is in the transformation business – he makes us new like a faulty computer that needs to be restarted. Thus our series on Rebooting. In this room there are many, many stories of how God has rebooted his people. The Bible also, being the transformational word of God, is also full of stories of rebooting. One of the most interesting, inspiring, and hope restoring is the story of Rahab. Let me set it up by reading about her when we first find her in Joshua 2. Listen:

(Read Joshua 2)

Here is a picture of transformation. Not only was Rahab a pagan, but she was a prostitute. It has been said, cynically, and maybe with some truth, that prostitution is the oldest profession. I'm not going to debate that, especially since Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd so it would appear, farmers and shepherds are older at the very least. But since Rudyard Kipling said it was the oldest profession in a short story he wrote in the 1880s it has come into usage, and it also allows me to use a play on words to convey a powerful message of transformation. Rahab was rebooted from the oldest profession to a new profession of faith. God does that. No one is too hopeless for God to do a new work in them. So in the minutes that remain, let's see how he transformed Rahab.

Let me start with this . . .

Yes! She was that bad

- Herbert Lockyer in his book *ALL THE WOMEN OF THE BIBLE*, writes, *“Both Jewish and Christian writers have tried to prove that Rahab was a different woman from the one whom the Bible always speaks of as a “harlot.” To them it was abhorrent that such a disreputable person should be included in our Lord’s genealogy (as she is in Matthew 1:5) and by Paul (Lockyer believed Paul was the author of Hebrews), as a woman of faith, and so her story has been distorted in order to further a scheme of salvation based upon human goodness. Although man’s sense of refinement may be shocked, the fact remains that Rahab, Tamar and Bathsheba were sinful women who were purged by God, and had their share in the royal line from which Jesus sprang.”*
 - Preachers have tried to soften Rahab's reputation by saying the word in Hebrew used for “harlot” in the KJV, and prostitute in the ESV, was actually, “innkeeper”. They wanted her to be the owner of a Bed & Breakfast rather than what she was: a sex worker.
 - But Rahab wasn't any more or any less than what we see here – she was a prostitute. And she was a logical person for spies to seek out – not for an illicit tryst, but for the fact that it was nothing new for strangers to be in her home, and also she would know the goings on in town. Jericho was a crossroad from Egypt to Mesopotamia and Asia Minor so traveling merchants would stop by for the services a prostitute provided. It happened all the time, and so it was good cover for spies who

wanted to fly under the radar and gather information at the same time. So that is exactly what the Israelite spies did.

- It was good cover . . . kinda. It worked well enough until the paranoia the king of Jericho was experiencing took over. He was terrified as he saw the people of Israel coming from a distance and he had a suspicion these weren't Rahab's usual run of the mill customers.
- The truth remains, Rahab made a living selling sex for money. She was a prostitute. I emphasize this, not to be salacious, but to show that we should . . .

Never ask, "How can God use me?"

- The spies needed to be hidden, and she hid them. She wasn't messing around – as she piled bundles of flax on them she confessed, *I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and 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.* Joshua 2:9-11.
- She was resourceful and she allowed God to utilize that skill. Lockyer writes, *"There was not only faith in her heart that God would be victorious, but also an assured peace when she hid the spies that her deliverance from destruction would be taken care of. She knew the rest of faith. In fact, Rahab is the only woman besides Sarah who is designated as an example of faith in the great cloud of witnesses."* Lockyer is referring to the passage Wayne read earlier which refers to Rahab, the prostitute, where she is included in what is referred to as the Hall of Fame of Faith as it is called in Hebrews 11. Listen to it again, *By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.* Hebrews 11:31.
- God utilized Rahab's gifts because she offered those gifts. She knew the God of the Israelites was real and the idols of her people were merely manmade creations. Her rebooting commenced from pagan prostitute to member of the Chosen People. Because of this . . .

Rahab is remembered for her faith and not for her sin

- Oh yes, she was a prostitute. We've established that and her profession is referred to three times in Joshua 2, again in Joshua 6, in the Hebrews passage I just referenced, AND in James 2:25. There is no avoiding it. She was also very loose with the truth as she deceived the pursuers of the spies. We can't soften it – Rahab lied. She also committed treason against her king as she hid the enemy.
- I love how F. B. Meyer puts it, *"The sacred writer does not commend Rahab's mode of life, nor her lies. Her morality was faulty enough. But beneath it, slowly smoldering, was a spark of pure love and faith and this would consume the rubbish and burn clear."* No doubt her actions began as self-preservation, but as God worked through her, faults and all, she became a rebooted paragon of faith. Meyer goes on to point out, *"It is not the amount of truth that we know which saves us, but the grasp with which we hold it. All that Rahab knew was very slight and partial, but she held to it with all the tenacity of her soul, and it was accounted to her for righteousness, (Romans 4:5) . . . She had yet to be delivered from falsehood and lying, but that God-consciousness which is the first ray of dawn had broken upon her, and would necessarily result in perfect day. Poor outcast as though she was, she became incorporated with Israel and the type of Gentile sinners who were permitted to sit with Christ in heavenly places."* Rahab is commended not for her falsehood but for her faith.
- In other words . . .

Rahab is a picture of God's grace in action

- She was a sinner in a sinful profession who was part of a pagan culture that didn't know God. But she knew there was something very special about these people who were God's Chosen. They were the in-crowd. She was an outsider in a culture of outsiders. But God had a plan. He still has a plan. His plan includes far more than his Chosen. They weren't chosen to exclude people for salvation, they were chosen to carry salvation to the world.

- Lockyer, again referring to the Hall of Fame of Faith in Hebrew 11 writes, “*What a manifestation of divine grace it is to find the one-time harlot ranked along with saints like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David! What are the lessons to be gathered from the harlot whom God used to fulfill His purpose? First of all, we are reminded by Rahab’s change of heart and life, that “His blood can make the vilest clean,” and that “His blood avails for me.” Was it not a wonderful condescension on the part of the Redeemer when He became manifest in the flesh to take hold of a root so humble in type as poor, despised Rahab to magnify His abounding grace for all sinners? Rahab was well worth saving from her evil life both for her own sake and for the place she had in God’s plan. . . . While the door of mercy stands ajar, the vilest sinner can return and know what it is to be saved and safe.* This a picture of what Paul meant when he wrote, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- Here’s the take away . . .

Conclusion: Our past is past when God gets hold of us.

Like Rahab, as we surrender to Christ our pasts are forgiven and the slate is wiped clean. In Joshua 6 (make sure you read it) Rahab and her family were delivered as she did exactly as the spies had told her. She was not instantly transformed into a perfect woman of God – but as time went on Rahab was no longer known as a prostitute, but as one worthy through God’s grace to be part of the lineage Jesus. Her past was past and she was part of the deliverance, not just of Israel, but of all humanity. She had a hand in helping sinners to be saved by grace.

Rahab was a recipient of incredible and endless and transforming love. From the oldest profession, to a transforming profession.

Here’s the beauty of it all, Rahab is not unique – the plan still works today and it works for anyone.

It brings to mind a favorite old song:

*That God should love a sinner such as I,
Should yearn to change my sorrow into bliss,
Nor rest till he had planned to bring me nigh,
How wonderful is love like this!
That Christ should join so freely in the scheme,
Although it meant his death on Calvary,
Did ever human tongue find nobler theme
Than love divine that ransomed me?
That for a wilful outcast such as I,
The Father planned, the Savior bled and died;
Redemption for a worthless slave to buy,
Who long had law and grace defied.
Such love, such wondrous love,
Such love, such wondrous love,
That God should love a sinner such as I,
HOW WONDERFUL IS LOVE LIKE THIS!*

Amen.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE IS AVAILABLE