

***Joshua: God Keeps His Promises***  
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series  
Fall 2022  
Pastor David Palmer  
**September 11, 2022**

**TEXT: Joshua 2:1-14**



Good morning, Beloved. We continue this morning in our fall series: “Joshua: God keeps His promises.” This morning we look at a passage where Joshua takes initiative. It’s a chapter where Joshua sends two spies across the Jordan River. At the center of the story is the first Canaanite we meet in the land—a woman named Rahab. This chapter gives us the Canaanite perspective, the perspective from the other side of the Jordan, as the Lord is preparing to bring us across these waters, as the Lord is preparing to fulfill the promises that He has made. We just sang together about a God who keeps His promises. Scripture is rooted in the history of a God who says what He will do and keeps His promises. This chapter tells us a powerful story about Rahab, a woman we meet here, but it's really a chapter about the Lord. It is about His power. It is about His character. It is about seeing the attractiveness of God and what He looks like to those around Him. We will discover in this chapter that God receives everyone who receives Him. So let's take a look at this together.

The chapter begins in Joshua 2:1, as Joshua sends out two men from Shittim, which is on the east side of the Jordan River. He gives them the challenge to view the land, especially to look at Jericho. You may remember that this checking out of the land, or this reconnaissance mission, was a critical point in Joshua's own journey of faith. Back in the book of Numbers, Moses had sent a group to the land to survey the land and bring back a report. They came back with a report that it was a good land and that God was giving it to them, yet most of the spies were terrified because there were people dwelling there, people who seemed hostile to them. Now Joshua sends men to go to Jericho specifically. What was he seeking to know and to learn?

What was he hoping to hear? The narrative will let us know.

They go to Jericho, which is the oldest city in the world. Jericho is also the lowest city in the world. This is an archaeological reconstruction of Bronze Age Jericho. It was a walled city, just like every city in the ancient near East. Jericho had two walls, though, an inner wall and an outer wall. It was famous for its walls. It actually not only had walls but also revetments. Now, when is the last time you used the word “revetment”? Be honest. This was the first time for me in a while, so I want to revive “revetment.” What is that? Revetment is that sloped base that you see. It's a sloped base on the city that is part of a massive complex of defenses. The city of Jericho was a prominent city. It was positioned near the Jordan River. It was at the intersection of major trade routes. It was famous in antiquity for palm groves. It was famous for balsam groves. It was a wealthy city. It's a city that we meet in the New Testament—it's where we see Zacchaeus meet Jesus.



The two men go to the city because it's the leading city that they encounter first across the Jordan. They are foreigners to the land; they are foreigners to the city. They go to the place where lots of visitors go—to Rahab's house. The text says that Rahab was a prostitute, that she worked out of her home. It was a home frequented by many, and the men go to her house, and she receives them as foreigners to her home. We're not told the details of their conversation at first. But we are told that it was reported to the king of Jericho that Rahab has received these men and, specifically, that these men are men of Israel, and they've come here to search out the land. The text says literally they have come to “dig out” the land. Maybe they want a tunnel into the city. Maybe they're looking for the wells. From the king of Jericho's perspective, their intention cannot be good. There's something suspicious about these men. So the king says to Rahab in Joshua 2:3:

*"Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."*

Then we discover that Rahab not only receives the men, but now she disobeys her king. Isn't that remarkable? She disobeys the king of Jericho, and, instead of bringing them out, she hides them. Instead of bringing them out, a situation in which they would face certain danger, maybe death, she lifts them up, and she takes them, as we will find, up to her roof. She hides them, as she diverts the king's attention. As we read in Joshua 2:4-5, she says:

*"True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went."*

*Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."*

She diverts the king and his messengers. And then we find out what she did with the men in Joshua 2:6. She had taken them up to the roof. Jericho is one of the earliest cities with a two-story house. Most people in the ancient world had a single story—ranch houses. Jericho was so wealthy, so nice, double walled, with a revetment, that it was safe and secure to have a second story. The second story of the house typically had a flat roof. Many houses in the Middle East still are built in this way, with a flat roof, often with a garden on the top. She brought them to the roof, and she hid them among the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.

Flax is one of the oldest cultivated plants in human history. Most of us benefit from flax in some way. You may wear linen pants. I have a linen shirt. I'm not wearing it now, because it's really difficult to keep it from being very wrinkly. Sheets are often made of linen. Flax grows; it's harvested; and then it's laid down to dry. The inner part of the flax plant is then pulled into a string-like substance. The straw is rolled with rollers, crushing the outer part of the plant into smaller pieces that are eventually scraped away. It's a very labor-intensive process. One person performing this (it's called scutching) can produce about fifteen pounds of flax fibers in a day. It's labor-intensive, and you end up at the end of the day with little fibers of flax that can be twisted together into thread and then woven into fabric.



It's the springtime. We know it's the springtime, because the flax harvest in Israel takes place after the spring rains. The Bible speaks of the early rain, that happens in the fall when planting begins, and then the latter rain is the rain that comes and waters everything that's been planted. One of the first crops to spring forth in the spring is flax. It's harvested in February or March, and then it's laid out to dry.



One of the earliest pieces of Hebrew writing that we have is called the Gezer Calendar. It's really tiny, just four inches high. It's a little square, and it's written by a man named Abiya. You can tell it's written by Abiya, because on the left side of this little four-inch square is the name Abiya.

This little four-inch square is a calendar that describes the months of the year and everything that happens. The year begins in the fall with two months of gathering (September, October), two months of planting (November, December), two months of late sowing (January, February), and one month cutting of flax in March. This little calendar describes the rhythm of the year, a rhythm that's unchanging to this day.

Rahab worked in an ancient vocation. She worked there, like most women who work in that

vocation, unwillingly. We see that she has arrayed her rooftop with flax and buried these men among the flax. The king's messengers then pursue the spies. They go as far as the fords on the east side of the Jordan. The city gate is shut. Rahab has received the men. She has disobeyed her king. She has hidden the men and diverted their pursuers. And we are left, as we read this text, wondering why. The Bible has such a beautiful way of telling its stories. It's so subtle, taking care in the Word of God to remind us that it's the springtime and to point out that it was flax that was on her roof, and all these details, and we're left wondering: Why in the world is she doing this? Why is she putting her life in danger? Why is she disobeying her sovereign? Why is she hiding these men? As we keep reading, we find out why in Joshua 2:9. We find that the focus of the story isn't on her hiding of the spies. The focus of this chapter is the conversation that happens next. She goes up to the roof where she had hidden them. It was before they fell asleep, and here she discloses her thoughts to the men. This is the longest speech of a woman in this whole section of the Bible. It's the first Canaanite speech we have in Scripture. In Joshua 2:9, we read:

*"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."*

She says to the men, *"I know that the Lord has given you the land.* I know that Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has given you this land. I know that. The fear, the terror, the dread of you has fallen upon us, and *all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you."* That's her opening statement. And we wonder what the spies wonder. How in the world does she know that? How does she know that God has made this staggering promise all the way back to Genesis 12, when God called Abraham to "leave your family; leave everything you know, and go to the land I will show you." Discipleship begins with a call to follow God, and you discover what is involved with following God only after you commit to following. You can't see the New Jerusalem unless you commit to following Jesus. You won't enter into it. You won't see the land that God has promised until you commit to following.

Rahab says, *"I know the Lord has given you the land."* What must the spies have felt to hear that as her opening sentence? How does she know this? The question is true for us this morning. The question is: How does anyone around us know anything about the Lord? Is Rahab doing online Bible studies in the book of Genesis? Has someone slipped a tract under her front door, reminding her of God's ancestral promise to Abraham, reiterated to Isaac and Jacob? No. She tells them and us this morning in Joshua 2:10:

*"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."*

Forty years ago God acted in a mighty way, and everyone around in the region heard about it.

She wasn't there. Her ancestors weren't there. But she heard about it. She heard about how God acted in an extraordinary and unique way. The God of creation revealed Himself to be the God of redemption at the crossing of the sea. God's people, our ancestors of faith, had been oppressed for 400 years: no days off, working without compensation in the Egyptian sun, making bricks for the arrogance of a Pharaoh who is unnamed in the Scriptures. God promises that He would rescue, that He would redeem, that He would reach out with a mighty outstretched arm, that He would rescue a community of slaves, and that He would bring us out. He brought us out, and we left after celebrating the Passover together. We applied the blood of the lamb to our doorposts, and the angel of death passed us by, and we came out as a community of freed slaves with no weapons. The largest army in the world at the time came rattling up behind us. We came to the edge of the waters, and we were terrified. We stood there, pinned in with the waters on one side and the rapidly approaching army coming at us, wondering what we should do. Was this a huge mistake? Then God spoke to the people through Moses in Exodus 14:13:

*"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today."*

Now that's something you would talk about, isn't it? We stood there in terror, afraid of what would happen. And the Lord acted. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord, the God of creation, drove the sea back with a strong east wind and revealed the path of dry ground in the midst of the sea until 600,000 of us walked through, with water on one side, water on the other. That's something you would talk about. I don't think you'd stop talking about that. I think you'd make some calls about that. We walked through, Beloved, and not only did we walk through, but then God brought the waters tumbling back and triumphed over Pharaoh and his army.

We could never achieve such a victory on our own, and we not only talked about it, but we sang about it. In Exodus 15:1-2, we read:

*"I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him, my Father's God, and I will exalt Him."*

The God who acted in this way said, "I am your God, Creator, Redeemer. I am your Savior. I am your King." Praise springs forth from God's people: *"Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?"*

Has anyone ever heard of a god like this God, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him? Rahab said, "We heard about the Lord. We heard about what the Lord did when He separated the waters and brought you out. Not only did we hear about what God did at the beginning of

your Exodus from Egypt," she says, "but we heard about God's protection along the way." She mentions the destruction of two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and said that, as we were journeying through the wilderness, preparing to enter the land, the Lord sent messengers to Sihon. We read in Joshua 2:22 that the message said:

*"Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into field or vineyard. We will not drink the water of a well. We will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory."*

Sihon, king of the Amorites, said, "No way. You can't come through my backyard." Sihon, king of the Amorites, refused passage, and he acted as he typically acted, as a petty local ruler ready to exploit everybody around him. He was not well-liked in antiquity. He refused passage, and the Lord gave him into our hands. The same thing happened with the second king, Og, king of Bashan.

Rahab says that we have heard about God's power to save. We have heard about God's power to protect. In Joshua 2:11, she says something even more extraordinary:

*"And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man."*

And then Rahab makes a confessional declaration. Rahab looks at these two men and she says in Joshua 2:11:

*"The LORD your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath."*

Rahab has heard enough of God's power to save, God's sovereignty to protect, and Rahab declares Israel's very own confession. This is the confession of Deuteronomy 4:37-39, when Moses says:

*"Because He loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with His own presence, by His great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."*

Do you know that the Lord our God is God alone? He is the only God. He is the only true God. He is the God who rescues. He is the God who protects. He is the God who is sovereign in heaven and on earth, and there is no other.

For Rahab the Canaanite to say this, Beloved, is a rejection of the gods of Canaan. It's a rejection of the gods of her ancestors for her to say, "Your God, He is God. He's God in heaven and on earth." Aren't you glad that God reigns in heaven and exercises His will and brings His will to pass on the earth? Aren't you glad that there is no other than the Lord our God? Rahab

declares a confession of faith. Her statement is a confession of belief. It is recognizing that: "I have heard enough of who God is, that I am ready to put my trust in Him." How did she hear about all this? God's people talked.

Rahab's confession of faith is clearly manifested in what happens next. She's ready, not just to disobey the king of Jericho. She's ready to put her trust in the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. She's ready to separate from everything she's known and to put her lot in with the people of God. Are you ready to do that? What she does is the very same thing that some of the Egyptians did. In Exodus 12, we read that there was a mixed multitude of people who came up with our ancestors out of Egypt. They had seen enough of the Lord's power to know that the Lord, He is God. This is the Old Testament way of becoming a believer: when you say, "What I've known is not true"; when you say, "The things I've trusted in, the people I've trusted in, the gods I've trusted in, can't keep their promises. They don't have the power to save, and I'm joining myself in with the Lord God who is enthroned in heaven and carries out His will on the earth."

The sincerity of her confession is clear, and she asks the men to take an oath. In Joshua 2:12, we read:

*"Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house."*

*"Swear to me by the Lord."* This is the language of oath-making. The ESV says, *"as I have dealt kindly with you that you will also deal kindly with my father's house."* This translation lies on top of one of the most important words in the Old Testament. It's the word *"hesed."* In Hebrew that means steadfast love, covenant loyalty. Rahab tells the men, "I have acted toward you with a covenant loyalty." In other words, "I have expressed my faith in the Lord God Almighty, and I have put everything I have in His hands. I have acted with loyalty, a covenant loyalty." And she says, "Will you reciprocate that back to me?"

What's it like when a brand-new Christian shows up on Sunday morning? For some of us, we have to stretch to remember that day. For some of us, it's recent. For some of us, it may be a long time ago, but let me remind you that when you cross the threshold and come into the sanctuary as a new believer, you know enough about the Lord to want to put your lot in with Him. But you also have many questions. You wonder what we do and why we do it. You also wonder: How will it go with me? Will I be received? Will I be welcomed into this new family?

Rahab's confession of faith is knowing enough of God to put her trust in Him and then risking everything to say, "I want to be part of this people." And she says to them, "Give me an oath

sign of your sincerity. Give me an oath that trusting in God is good for me." And she cares about her entire family. In Joshua 2:12-13, she says:

*"Give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."*

In Joshua 2:14, the men reply:

*"Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."*

The men say to her *"our life for yours even to death"* if we do not deal kindly and faithfully with you, if we do not return your covenant loyalty. She asks them for a sign, and they give her one. They hand her a scarlet cord, maybe having just taken it from their linen garment. In Joshua 2:18, we read:

*"Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household."*

"Take this scarlet cord," the spies say, "and tie it in the window, and when we return we will see the scarlet cord hanging from the window, and the Lord will watch over you and your whole family." So, Beloved, is it true that God receives all who receive Him? It is. Rahab knows enough of the Lord to put her trust in Him. When she asks them to reciprocate this covenant loyalty, this steadfast love, and to give her an oath sign, the sign is found in the crimson cord hanging from her window.



This story, told in a concise way, ends with suspense. Rahab doesn't know, when she ties the cord, exactly what will happen, and she has to wait. We don't have to wait very long, because you can leave the service and read a few chapters and find out what happens. Her faith in the Lord is well-placed.

This short passage has much to teach us. On the one hand, it teaches us lessons from Joshua's perspective to move forward only when the Lord confirms. The spies bring back the good report that the Lord has given us the land and move forward. There are lessons for us from the perspective of the spies who were willing to risk their lives when required and to trust God in the midst of danger.

But the center of the story is Rahab, and the center of her story is the testimony that she had heard enough about the Lord to put her trust in Him. She had discovered that there is a great chasm between the gods of Canaan and the Lord God Almighty, between the life of the city of

man and the life of the City of God. She had heard God's power to save, God's power to protect, and God's sovereignty to connect heaven and earth in His will. She placed her faith in Him.

Her faith is commended throughout the Scriptures. Hebrews 11 commends Rahab for her faith. James 2 commends Rahab for her faith, and Rahab is tucked inside the genealogy of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 1. Her faith in the Lord is well-placed, and we will discover in just a couple of weeks what happens. Her expression of covenant loyalty is reciprocated. Her faith provides a model for us this morning of one who believes in God's historical actions. She confirms her faith in the reality of it by being willing to preserve God's people and advance God's Kingdom. Her story confirms for us God's welcome to everyone who welcomes Him, whatever their condition, whatever their background. Jesus Christ dies for all the world. He carries the sin of the world, and He offers forgiveness and full redemption and a new identity for all who trust in Him.

For us, as God's people, there's a challenge in this passage to speak about Him, to speak about what He's done, to make a few calls, if you will. Rahab challenges all of us, Beloved, this morning. What are you talking about? What's subject of your conversations? Even better, who is the subject of your conversations? If you look at your conversations this last week and weigh them up, how much of them were really about the Lord? Rahab challenges us all to speak about what the Lord has done for us, for our ancestors, in our weekly provision, how He's moving in our lives to confirm His will and guide us. It's not spiritual boasting, and I'm not saying you should pretend to be someone that you're not, but you should speak of the Lord and what He's doing.

It can be one of the simplest entry points into the hearts and lives of people around you to say: How can I pray for you? Let them hear enough of the Lord, as Rahab heard, that she was willing to put her faith in Him. And all she asked in return was: "Will you reciprocate my loyalty?" That means going out of our way to welcome the new person. It means going out of our way to hear the story. It means going out of our way to assurance of forgiveness. It means going out of our way to say we have all been a community of redeemed sinners, saved by the miraculous power and mercy of the Lord God Almighty, who keeps all of His promises. And that's a living hope that we share together. Let's be about that this week.

Lord, we praise You. We thank You for this portion of Your Word. We thank You for revealing Your identity and character and using the testimony of our own lips to who You are and what You have done. Thank You, Lord, that Rahab heard of You and heard enough about You to place her real trust in You and to manifest that trust with concrete action. Lord, we thank You for the vivid image of the crimson cord hanging from the window, that I have tied myself to You. Lord, I thank You that that trust is well-placed, because You are trustworthy, and that You are a God

who keeps all of Your promises. We thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your mercy. We thank You, Lord Jesus, for claiming us as Your very own. We praise You, Lord Jesus, that You have conquered sin and death and hell and that You are our salvation and our living hope.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.