

Lesson 42
The Simplicity of Faith
Hebrews 11:31

What do we mean when we say, “God saves sinners by a simple act of faith in Christ Jesus the Lord”? Simple faith - what is it? The simplicity of faith is one of the great and profound mysteries of Christianity. Faith is so simple that we often overlook it and become confused because everything in us wants to work for salvation. Yet the Scriptures are clear that salvation is by God’s grace and appropriated through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament character of Rahab is a perfect example of how God saves sinners by a simple act of faith. Rahab will stand forever as a trophy of God’s infinite grace. ***“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace”*** (Heb. 11:31).

THE BACKGROUND

The author of the Book of Hebrews has just mentioned the faith of Israel in its great triumph over the city of Jericho. God, in response to the people’s faith, did a great miracle, and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down when the priests blew the trumpets and the people shouted.

Now the author’s mind goes to one particular person who was inside Jericho when Israel was marching around it for seven days. His mind flashes to Rahab the harlot whom God marvelously saved.

Rahab was not only a despicable Gentile, but she was also a harlot, a woman of the street who lowered herself to prostitution. This practice, while common, was looked down upon even in pagan lands. There is no question about it - Rahab was a sinner. By her own choice she was given over to the vilest of sins, but by divine choice she was predestined to be saved by God’s grace. There was absolutely nothing in this poor, fallen woman to commend her to God, but where sin abounded grace did much more abound. All men are secret sinners, but this woman was an open sinner; everyone knew her. She had an evil reputation, but she got her name in Hebrews 11, the Old Testament believer’s Hall of Fame.

John Calvin said that she is only described as “the harlot” in order to magnify the grace of God in reclaiming her from such a disgraceful past, for it is certain that “her faith is the evidence of her repentance.”

RAHAB’S FAITH - Joshua 2:9-11

“... and said to the men, 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.” -- Because we need to understand how Rahab was saved to appreciate her great act of faith, we must break into the middle of the historical account of Rahab. These words were given by Rahab to the two spies, and they tell us how she was marvelously saved. Rahab was saved before the spies ever came into Jericho. Rahab had heard, from her fellow countrymen through gossip, the truths about the one, true God of Israel. She heard of God and His power. She simply believed that ***“the LORD God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”*** Rahab believed what she heard in simple faith, and God saved her. The other inhabitants of Jericho had heard and trembled temporarily but soon rationalized away any responsibility to God.

This is an amazing act of God in saving one of His elect. There were no sabbaths in Jericho; there were no prophets sounding forth messages from heaven; there were no Scripture readings and no ordinary means of grace God might use in the saving of a soul. Nevertheless, God saved Rahab. She heard the message of the God of Israel and believed.

How much understanding did she have? She had very little understanding of the gospel, but she understood three things: 1) She was a sinner; 2) God is an all-powerful, miracle-working God who has the power to save or destroy; and 3) Faith in God is essential to be forgiven and saved.

Rahab was like most of us when we were saved. When we came to Christ, we had little theological understanding and probably did not even understand the gospel too well, but in simple faith we knew we were sinners, and we cast ourselves on God to save us through Jesus Christ. God did save us, and then, as we began to grow, we came into a deeper understanding of our salvation.

What is a Christian? A Christian is one who believes that Jesus Christ died for his sins. God justifies those who believe in Jesus. ***“... that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”*** (Rom.3:26). A true Christian can say, “I am saved because Jesus died for my sins, and in simple faith - I believe this to be a fact.” Quite often I talk to men about being saved and they answer, “Yes, I have been a Methodist all my life.” But that is not answering the question. I do not get a straight answer from people about salvation. If I ask a man if he is saved, I like to get the answer, “Yes, I’m saved because Jesus died for me.” However, folks do not usually give that answer. When you ask people about being a Christian, nine out of ten times they will tell you what denomination they are. God does not save Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans or Independents because of their denomination. Even in New Testament times Christians were following men instead of Christ, and this prompted the Apostle Paul to say, “Did I die for you?” If you are a Lutheran, did Luther die for you? If you are a Methodist, did Wesley die for you? If you are a Presbyterian, did Calvin die for you? No, a thousand times no!! We are Christians because Christ died for us, and in simple faith we have believed this to be a true fact. When you are asked about your salvation, you should reply, “Praise the Lord, I am saved because Jesus died for me, a sinner, and I believe His death will take me to heaven.”

RAHAB’S FAITHFULNESS - Joshua 2:1-7

“Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, ‘Go, view the land, especially Jericho.’ So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.” -- General Joshua sent two spies into Jericho thinking that this was the way to detect the strength of the enemy, but there was no need for this because God had already told Joshua that He would defeat the enemy. God sent those two spies into Jericho for Rahab, not to gather intelligence. Those spies were sent so Rahab could openly declare her faith and prove by her works that she was a true believer.

When the spies came into the city, they had no idea that one of God’s elect lived there. They were trusting God to lead them and He did - right to the home of Rahab. What an act of the secret, providential hand of God in leading his children, for they found Rahab in a city of multiple thousands.

“And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, ‘Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.’ And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, ‘Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.’” -- Apparently these spies were trailed to the home of Rahab, and she was told to reveal their whereabouts.

“But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, ‘Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it came about when it was time to shut the gate, at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.’ But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate,” -- Rahab, proving that she was a true believer, hid the spies. Her faith was backed up with positive works. Now it was true that Rahab lied to the authorities, and most certainly this was wrong, but lying was a way of life for a harlot, and surely all of her past ways did not pass out of existence in a few days. Rahab probably would not have lied one or two years later, but baby believers do not shed their bad habits immediately. However, God was pleased with her heart’s desire to do God’s will. ***“If Thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared”*** (Psalm 130:3-4).

Rahab was an amazing believer. She stood true for God when she was the only believer in a city of thousands. She did not believe because it was the popular thing to do. No, she believed when all others rejected, and she stood alone for God.

Rahab also displayed a self-denying faith, for when she believed, she cut off her relations with all the unsaved in Jericho and cast her lot with the saved Israelites. She renounced everything to become a follower of the one, true, and living God.

RAHAB’S FAMILY - Joshua 2:12-15

“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 and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and

deliver our lives from death.’ So the men said to her, ‘Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.’ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall.” -- Rahab had experienced God’s grace and found herself a forgiven sinner and a new spiritual creation. She was so overflowing with God’s mercy to her that now she had the boldness to ask God to shed grace on her whole family. She knew and understood that God was gracious and full of compassion.

Rahab’s family was delivered because of Rahab’s faith. God honored her faith and delivered her family. Obviously her family later believed or they could have never become part of Israel.

New Christians always have a special desire to see their loved ones saved. It is perfectly natural that we should desire God to save our families. What becomes wrong is when we demand that God save our loved ones. When we begin to dictate instead of supplicate about our families, we are in deep trouble.

RAHAB’S FINAL REWARD - Joshua 6:22-25

“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 and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought all her relatives, and placed them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.” -- God gave Rahab the desire of her heart. He delivered her and her family from total destruction. She had been faithful to God, and God, in turn, rewarded her faithfulness.

A Christian will be paid back in full for every act of faith he does for God. God loves to reward the Christian’s faith.

“However, Rahab the harlot and her father’s household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.” -- Rahab and her family were delivered from certain destruction. Notice it says, *“She lived in the midst of Israel.”* Rahab the harlot, a Gentile sinner, got saved and was given a place among God’s people. Oh, how Rahab is a trophy of God’s infinite grace. She was cleansed and made whole, and she was accepted among God’s people. Her past was wiped clean, and she was greatly blessed by God. Rahab was a harlot, but she did not stay a harlot. She went and sinned no more.

Later Rahab married a prince of Judah and became the mother of Boaz and one of the grandmothers of King David. In Matthew 1:5, Rahab’s name is listed in the genealogies - she was in the line of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, what grace! Oh, what love! Oh, what mercy! God touched Rahab by His grace and all she did was believe in the one, true and living God. God’s sovereignty brought her from the depths of sin and shame and gave her honor and dignity. Rahab was a sinner saved through a simple act of faith in God. Truly, the rewards of faith are most excellent and glorious.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps you are without Christ, without the forgiveness of sins, without any hope of eternal life. God saves sinners through Christ. Perhaps you are thinking that God will not forgive you. Are you worse than Rahab? Rahab was a prostitute, but God forgave her. Perhaps you are guilty of some gross sin or sins, like premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness or whatever. God saves sinners. How? Through a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ. If God saved Rahab, He can save you, and He will the moment you trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by a simple act of faith.

Hebrews 11:31 states, ***“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”*** Rahab did not perish because of her sins, but all the other inhabitants of Jericho, most of whom had better lives than Rahab, perished in their sins. Why? Because Rahab believed in God, and God honored her faith. The others rejected and perished.

What must you do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.