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## *Kindness to the Fearful (Joshua 2:8-21)*

*9/3/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*



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It all seemed to happen so fast. When she was a little girl, Rahab's parents told her stories about the miraculous disasters that ruined Egypt and brought the Israelite slaves out of that country. Rahab's father still had a glow in his eyes when he said the God of the Israelites was unlike any other god. He did these unbelievable wonders, all exactly when his prophet Moses said it would happen. He even killed all the first-born sons in Egypt in just one night. It was terrifying. Then, when the Israelites left Egypt, their God separated the Red Sea so that they walked through on dry ground. And then when Pharaoh's army chased after the Israelites, their God brought those waters down on them and completely wiped them out!

But the most terrifying thing her parents told her was that when they were young, after the Israelites left Egypt, they headed toward her city, Jericho! Everyone was terrified. How could they fight off a nation with a God that powerful? But then the Israelites turned back and wandered into the desert. The whole thing just seemed like a fairy tale or a legend. All those nature-defying miracles happened and then all of a sudden the Israelites just disappeared into the desert. They had been gone for years. "There's no way," people said, "There's no way that many people could find enough food out there for that long!" They thought the terror was gone.

Then, suddenly, Rahab experienced the fear herself for the first time. The Israelites came out of that desert, alive and well. Somehow, their God had kept them alive for almost 40 years in that desolate land. They were coming back and this time, she knew, they weren't just going to leave. There was mass panic in Jericho. In spite of her terror, she had profited a little by the scare. People were more eager to pay for her services as a prostitute just to get their mind off everything.

But Rahab couldn't stop thinking about it. Deep down, she knew the Israelites would destroy everyone and everything she knew. But her inevitable death wasn't the worst part. The worst part was Rahab knew that they deserved it. Rahab loved her family and friends. Most of them were good people, at least she liked to tell herself that they were.

But with the coming destruction, she started to see things differently. She started to recognize the selfishness in herself and in the people around her. She started to see the injustice inherent in her people's way of life. Things that had seemed so normal and good to her while she was growing up now showed themselves to be wicked, to be wrong. She thought of all the children sacrificed to her gods. She thought of her own occupation as a prostitute. She knew she wasn't as

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good as she liked to believe she was. She knew the God of the Israelites would bring the destruction that she and her city deserved.

We don't know what thoughts ran through Rahab's mind as the Israelites led by the Almighty God came toward Jericho. In Joshua chapter 2, we find out that she and everyone in the city were terrified. They knew they didn't stand a chance against God.

We also find out that Rahab had faith that the God of the Israelites, the God who was justly coming to destroy everything she knew, was also a God of mercy. We don't know how she learned that but Joshua 2 shows us 2 things about Rahab. First, she was terrified by God. She knew that she faced God's anger and punishment. And second, we see that even in her terror, Rahab found kindness from the very God she feared. She believed that the God of Israel was not only a God of justice, but also a God of kindness and mercy, and she trusted in him.

The New Testament tells us clearly that God created faith in Rahab's heart even though she was not one of the chosen nation of Israel, even though she was a prostitute. Hebrews 11 says, "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." James says that her actions were proof of the faith she had in her heart; faith that God would have mercy on her!

And God certainly did show her kindness. Not only was Rahab saved, but every one of her loved ones who joined her in her house with that red cord in the window, all of them were saved. And if escaping the punishment she deserved wasn't enough, God even found her a special place in God's plan of salvation. Matthew, chapter 1 tells us that Rahab became an ancestor of Jesus, the Savior of the whole world! What an honor shown to this absolute nobody! What mercy shown to such a sinner! What kindness shown to this terrified woman! God not only spared her but welcomed her into his family.

You and I aren't all that different from Rahab. Like Rahab, we have every reason to be terrified of God. No, he's not coming to conquer our city with an Israelite army, but he is coming. Judgment Day is coming. And on that day, Jesus will appear to judge the world and everyone will get exactly what they deserve.

What do we deserve? Well, how do we measure up to God's law? Have we been perfect like God demands? Or have we contented ourselves with our own definitions of "good enough"? Do we demand that God meet our standards rather than us having to meet his? Have we dedicated our lives to doing good works? Or have we contented ourselves with just looking down on the "really bad" people, as if that somehow made us less disobedient to God?

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Is that enough to avoid God's anger? Do we think that we will escape judgment by condemning the unbelievers around us while all along *we* fail to put God first in how we use our time, money, and talents? Are we better than the enemies of Christianity when every day *we* fight against God by our continued refusal to fear, love, and trust God above everything else? Are we really any better than the unbeliever when we too consistently break the first commandment every day?

Or Do we think God will spare us because we condemn our culture for its senseless murder of hundreds of thousands of unborn babies each year, while all along, you and I fail to love our neighbors as ourselves? Will God really ignore our refusal to love our neighbors as ourselves? Will he just pass over every moment we have ignored our neighbor's needs? Will God fail to see the times we hypocritically hold our neighbors to harsher standards than we hold ourselves to? Are we really better than the murderers when *we* too break the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment?

Is it enough to condemn the culture we live in for resisting God when we ourselves don't do what God says? We need to wake up. We are constantly resisting God, constantly pushing him away. All of us, everyone falls short of what God demands from us. We live in lies, hypocrisy, and selfishness and we often aren't even aware of it. Honestly, we don't even live up to our own standards. So why do we pretend to be better than other people? Why do we pretend that our lives don't deserve death and punishment?

Judgment Day is a terrifying day, because on that day everyone will get what they deserve. And what we deserve is terrifying. What we deserve is God's anger. What we deserve is death and punishment. And Judgment Day could come at any time! Any moment! I may not even finish this sermon before it comes! We have every reason to be terrified of God.

But, like Rahab, we have reason to hope. Like Rahab, we have learned that God shows Kindness to the Fearful. We have learned that our God is merciful! He sent his Son to live according to God's standards. Jesus actually did love God above all else. Jesus actually did love his neighbor as himself. And Jesus did those things every moment! He never failed even for a second! And through faith, God considers Jesus' perfection to be yours and mine!

Then Jesus suffered the death and punishment that all our failings deserved! All our self-righteous judging, all our hypocrisy, all our hatred which is murder in God's sight, all our ignoring God and his Word which is idolatry in his sight, all our sins were nailed to the cross with Christ. Jesus suffered the terrifying anger that we deserved.

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Rahab's hope did not come from her life, but from God's mercy. So too, our hope comes not from our lives, but from God's mercy, from his Kindness to the Fearful. Rahab trusted that the scarlet cord in her window would save her from the coming destruction. We trust that the scarlet blood that Jesus shed on the cross will save us from the destruction of Judgment Day. Because Jesus died and rose, we have confidence that God will show us kindness and mercy on Judgment Day.

And, like Rahab, God's mercy will not only spare us from the coming Judgment, but God has also graciously brought us into his family, the Holy Christian Church. Just as Rahab was given the opportunity to serve in God's plan for salvation, you and I have that opportunity as well!

Rahab helped the Israelite spies and she became a human ancestor of Jesus. You and I have the opportunity every day to live our lives as forgiven sinners. We live our lives conscious of the mercy God has shown us, rather than self-righteously demanding more than we deserve. We live our lives showing mercy to those who don't deserve it rather than looking down on others for their sins and mistakes. We live our lives in repentance because God has saved us from our sins, rather than living in that former life that only earned us death. And when God gives us the opportunity, we can show other people where they too can find mercy from God: in the cross of Christ.

Our lives give us every reason to fear God, just as Rahab and those in Jericho were melting in fear. But God's mercy gives us hope just like Rahab had hope even as she stared death in the face. Jesus gives us every confidence that God will show Kindness to the Fearful. That kindness leads us to repentance. It leads us to live as forgiven sinners, as those who have undeservedly received mercy. It leads us to live our faith just like Rahab did. We need not live in fear. Instead, we live in hope for God's kindness. In Christ, that kindness is yours. Amen.