

Prayers

Opening prayer

Jesus Christ, we praise You for we find our peace in you. In You, we know the victory of the Cross, the love of the Father, the care of the Christian community, the empowerment of the Spirit, the wisdom of Your Word and the wonder of Your presence. May we never find ourselves doubting the extraordinary power of Your love for us, made real for us in Christ. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme for the week: action

1. For yourself

Look ahead and think about what you could do for the Lord. Perhaps you do not wish to do anything in particular but know you ought to; so pray about this.

2. For your friends and family

Pray for your friends and family, pray that those who are Christians will know the love of God calling them to do His will

3. For the church and its work

Pray for the church, and especially that it will be ready to take action to help the people in need who come to its door.

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for Christian organisations that seek to engage with people on the streets. Pray God's blessing on such ventures.

Meditation

You have taken us as we are, Lord God
And then You have challenged us and changed us
You have lifted us out of the troubled depths of life
And delivered us onto the firmer ground of faith
You have listened to all the complaints we've made
And directed us back towards righteousness and truth
You have seen the sins we struggle to confess
And dealt with them in glorious power, and saved us
You have heard our calls for help when in despair
And fought the enemy on our behalf, to liberate us
You have felt the scars of all human incapacity
And have touched our wounds, and healed us
Yours, O Lord, is the power and the Glory!

Bible Study

Bible passage – Joshua 2:8-14

⁸ Before the spies went to sleep, Rahab came to them on the roof ⁹ and said to them:

'I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that a fear of you has come over us and all who live in the land are overcome with fear because of you. ¹⁰ For we have

heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹ As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted and our courage failed us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.

¹² 'Now then, swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that in turn you will deal kindly with my family. Give me a pledge of good faith ¹³ that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver us from death.'

¹⁴ The men said to her,

'Our lives for yours! If you do not tell what we are doing, then we will deal kindly and loyally with you when the LORD gives us the land.'

Review

Yesterday, we began to read the story of the spies who went into Jericho before the invasion of the Promised Land by Israel. They escaped capture because a prostitute, Rahab, protected them from those sent by the King of Jericho to capture them (2:1-7). The majority of this passage today contains the words of Rahab herself as she spoke to the Israelite spies hidden on her roof. We tend to remember the end, where Rahab pleaded for her life, asking that the Israelites would spare her and her family when the time came for the invasion of the city (2:12,13). Her request was met positively (2:14), and the promise was kept after the battle of Jericho (6:22-25).

It would be tempting to read and fail to consider anything further in what Rahab said, but there is more for us to consider. What Rahab said is remarkable in several ways, not least because it is a rare substantial speech by a woman, standing alongside the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), the speeches of Esther in the book of Esther, and the words of the woman in the love song of the 'Song of Solomon'. Rahab tells the story of the Exodus briefly, reflecting a godly perspective on those events, and confessing her belief in God and His right to give the land of Canaan to Israel (2:9). Rahab went to the roof to speak to the spies, and told them all this at a time of heightened tension in the city of Jericho when the king clearly believed that Israel posed a fearsome threat. Rahab not only took the opportunity to side with the Israelites in the belief that they were the more powerful, but was prepared to go further and express belief in God. We must not forget that the Israelites, the story of God's power at the time of the Exodus and deliverance from the Red Sea was holy. For them, it was the primary evidence of God's work in the world to save His people. In churches today we might recite a 'creed', which is like a 'statement of faith' binding Christians together. For Israel, Deuteronomy 6:20-25 confirms that the story of the Exodus through the Red Sea was essential to Israelite faith, the story was memorised, recited, and written down on ornaments and worn on the body (Deut 6:8,9).

Rahab recounted the basic Exodus story (2:10) and also confirmed what Moses records in scripture of God's reasons for delivering His people through the Red Sea. In Exodus 14:1-4, the Lord declares to Moses that his purpose was to defeat Pharaoh so that other nations would know that 'I am the Lord.' Now, in all Israel's journey through the wilderness they had sought peaceful passage, yet they were not given it (see the book of Numbers). Rahab clearly knew this, citing the battle between Israel and the Kings of Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:21f.), and Israel's victory over this opposition on the other side of the Jordan from Jericho. Rahab was therefore the first person of another nation to accept the evidence of the Exodus that God was supreme, saying, 'the Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below ...' (2:11). In addition, when Rahab sought an assurance that the spies would 'deal kindly' with her (2:12,13), her words meant more than we imagine. We cannot see in English that Rahab used the famous word 'cheseth' (meaning 'faithful love' or 'kindliness'), which was closely linked with the covenant promises of God in the book of Genesis. So Rahab had heard the evidence of God, believed it, acted on her belief and asked to be part of the 'covenant' community of God's people!

It is therefore possible to see in this simple story the basic elements of conversion to faith in God, even in Old Testament times. Rahab's expression of faith as explained in this way is not far from the beginnings of Christian conversion, except Jesus is not spoken of because the story is part of the Old Testament. Yet even as a partial explanation of someone's journey of faith, it has much to teach us. Sometimes people respond to God in very similar ways today, and they come to church with a faith similar to that of Rahab. They may be short of a great deal of understanding of the deeper things of Christian faith, but with Rahab, they should be welcomed into the community of God's people.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group whether you believe that the story of Rahab here has sufficient interest or theology for a sermon.
2. What needs to be added to Rahab's 'faith' for a fuller Christian understanding of God?
3. Why was this part of the story of Rahab included in scripture?

Discipleship challenges

- *Have you known people who have 'turned up' at church with the hope of finding something or someone who will answer their spiritual needs, or with some basic faith which need to be explored? Reflect on what happens to such people in your church.*
- *Pray for all who have a belief in God today, and yet who are not willing to act on that belief, for whatever reason. This gives you wide scope because large numbers of people fall into this category! This, however, is an issue that needs to be dealt with more actively by the church today.*

Final Prayer

You grant power to us to do Your will, O Lord, and we praise You for this. Lead us on to be able and willing to do more for you as our lives unfold, and so be ever more fruitful in Your Kingdom. We pray this in confidence, O Lord, because of Your gracious love. AMEN
