

## **LEARNING ABOUT FAITH FROM A PROSTITUTE**

**Hebrews 11:31**

**The Faith Chapter**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. **Ralph Waldo Emerson** said, “In my walks, every man I meet is my superior in some way, and in that I learn from him.”
2. His point was that you can learn something from everyone you meet.
3. We see this in the Bible. The book of Proverbs teaches life lessons from ants. Jesus taught life lessons by pointing to birds, and flowers, and seeds. You can learn something from anyone and anything.
4. When I was a kid I read a book called *Twice Pardoned* about a man named Harold Morris. It was a true story. Harold was in prison serving two life sentences for murder and armed robbery. One day while the prisoners were outside in the yard, a twelve-year-old boy from the neighborhood walked up to the fence and said to Harold, “Hey man, I’m not afraid of you.” Harold said, “Come over to this side of the fence and say that to me.” Eventually they struck up a close friendship. The boy told Harold that he loved him, and that he believed in him. The boy became the most important person in Harold’s life. He looked forward to him coming every day. That boy was a Christian, and he led Harold to Christ. At the same time, the boy told Harold that he wanted to be the greatest basketball player in the world. Harold had been an All-State basketball player before prison, so he offered to teach him. Every day the boy would bring his basketball, and Harold would teach him how to play, through the fence. Eventually that young man’s high school team went on to win the state championship, and he was the most outstanding player. Harold Morris was eventually released from prison and he spent the rest of his life as preacher and evangelist. An inmate learned about Jesus from a little boy, and a little boy learned how to play basketball from an inmate. You can learn something from anyone.
5. Today we’re going to learn about faith from a prostitute.
6. We’re in a sermon series on Hebrews 11, The Faith Chapter, which is all about faith – what faith is, and what faith does. To teach us about faith

the author points to the heroes of the Old Testament – people like Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Joshua. In today’s text we’re going to see the most surprising example of faith – a prostitute.

## II. TEXT: Hebrews 11:31

1. **Hebrews 11:31** “By faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn’t perish with those who disobeyed.”

## III. BACKSTORY

1. Who is Rahab?
2. Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land. He died.
3. Joshua took over as the leader of Israel.
4. The Lord commanded Joshua to cross the Jordan and claim the promised land for Israel.
5. To inhabit the promised land, the Israelites would have to defeat the inhabitants.
6. Their first battle would be against Jericho.
7. Joshua sent two men as spies to scout Jericho. Joshua 2:1
8. The men came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. Josh 2:1
9. The king of Jericho was told about the spies, so he sent his soldiers to Rahab's house and ordered her to turn over the spies. Josh 2:2-3
10. But Rahab had hidden the men. Josh 2:4
11. Rahab told the king's men, **Joshua 2:4-5**, "Yes, the men did come to me, but I didn't know where they were from. 5 At nightfall, when the city gate was about to close, the men went out, and I don't know where they were going. Chase after them quickly, and you can catch up with them!"
12. But Rahab had hidden the men among the stalks of flax on the roof. (Flax is used to make linen fabric.) Josh 2:6
13. The soldiers believed Rahab and pursued the Israelite spies outside the city. Josh 2:7
14. Rahab told the spies, **Joshua 2:8-11**, "I know that the LORD has given you this land and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and everyone who lives in the land is panicking because of you. 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 Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings you completely destroyed across the Jordan. 11 When we heard

- this, we lost heart, and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on earth below."
15. Then Rahab made a request of the spies: **Joshua 2:12-13** "12 Now please swear to me by the LORD that you will also show kindness to my father's family, because I showed kindness to you. Give me a sure sign 13 that you will spare the lives of my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all who belong to them, and save us from death."
  16. The spies gave Rahab their word that they would show kindness and faithfulness to Rahab when the Lord gives them the land if she doesn't report their mission. Josh 2:14
  17. Then Rahab let the men down by a rope through the window, since she lived in a house that was built into the wall of the city. She told them how to avoid capture. **Joshua 2:16** "Go to the hill country so that the men pursuing you won't find you," she said to them. "Hide there for three days until they return; afterward, go on your way."
  18. The spies gave Rahab one final word of instruction: **Joshua 2:17-20** "We will be free from this oath you made us swear, 18 unless, when we enter the land, you tie this scarlet cord to the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, mother, brothers, and all your father's family into your house. 19 If anyone goes out the doors of your house, his death will be his own fault, and we will be innocent. But if anyone with you in the house should be harmed, his death will be our fault. 20 And if you report our mission, we are free from the oath you made us swear."
  19. When the men left, Rahab tied the scarlet cord to the window.
  20. When the time came for the battle of Jericho, Joshua instructed his soldiers to kill everyone in the city except for Rahab and her family. **Joshua 6:17** "But the city and everything in it are set apart to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone with her in the house will live, because she hid the messengers we sent."
  21. Then Joshua sent the two spies back to Rahab's house to rescue her. **Joshua 6:22-23** "Go to the prostitute's house and bring the woman out of there, and all who are with her, just as you swore to her." 23 So the young men who had scouted went in and brought out Rahab and her father, mother, brothers, and all who belonged to her. They brought out her whole family and settled them outside the camp of Israel."

#### IV. FOUR LESSONS ABOUT FAITH FROM RAHAB

##### 1. By faith, anyone can be saved.

- i. After the New Testament, the earliest Christian writer was Clement of Rome, one of the earliest bishops of the church in Rome. He was said to be a personal acquaintance of the apostles. He wrote that Rahab was a prophetess, because the scarlet rope she used to rescue the spies as well save her family foreshadowed the truth that anyone can be saved by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.
- ii. Rahab wasn't a good person. She was a prostitute. In fact, some writers have tried to clean up her reputation. For example, Josephus said she was an innkeeper. Another commentator named Rashi made her a seller of food. But the Hebrew word for prostitute or harlot that is used of Rahab is not even the word used of a temple prostitute (qedeshah), but rather a secular harlot (zonah)." (F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 328.) She was not a good person.
- iii. As well, Rahab was not a Jew. She was a Gentile. In fact, she was an Amorite, which was a group of people that God had marked for destruction (Gen 15:16). **Mark Dunn** wrote, "Jericho was part of the Amorite kingdom, a grotesquely violent, totally depraved, thoroughly pagan culture so hell-bent on the pursuit of everything evil that God Himself had condemned them and ordered the Israelites to wipe them from the face of the earth [Deut. 20:17]. Rahab therefore epitomized the vileness of the Amorite culture at a point when they had collectively filled the measure of human wickedness to its very brim ([https://founders.org/studies/ss-life-2019-06-02/#:~:text=Rahab%20therefore%20epitomized%20the%20vileness,totally%20dependent%20on%20consensual%20evil\).](https://founders.org/studies/ss-life-2019-06-02/#:~:text=Rahab%20therefore%20epitomized%20the%20vileness,totally%20dependent%20on%20consensual%20evil).)"
- iv. **John MacArthur** wrote about the Amorites, "They were a debauched, idolatrous, and wicked people. They were noted for their grossly immoral and perverted sexual practices as well as for their general cruelty. Among other things, they frequently put live

- babies in jars and built them into their city walls as foundation sacrifices. They were begging for judgment (Hebrews, 364)."
- v. So, Rahab was not a good person. Rahab was not a Jew. She was a wicked person from a people group that were so wicked God had decided to annihilate them.
  - vi. Yet while all the rest of Rahab's neighbors were destroyed under God's judgment, Rahab and her family were saved. Why? Faith. Rahab had heard the rumors about the Israelites God, and she believed in Him. That's why she protected the two spies, and why she was saved.
  - vii. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news because God will save anyone from His coming judgment by faith. It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done, or how many times you have done it, God will forgive your sins and give you eternal life if you will put your faith in Jesus Christ.
  - viii. God doesn't choose who to save based on how good they are, because we all deserve the same thing – hell. Some of us deserve a hotter hell than others, but all of us deserve hell. The only way to be saved is by faith in Jesus Christ, that He died in your place for your sins and rose again.
  - ix. One time our church did a free car wash. The whole point was to send a message to the community that Church Acadiana was here to serve and meet needs. We told our volunteers: No matter what, do not accept donations. However that was harder than it sounds, because there were a ton of people who demanded to give a donation. They did not understand the word free. They literally tried to force donations on us. Many people are like that with the gospel. They can't understand that it is a free gift received by faith. No matter what you say, they insist on trying to earn salvation. But you don't deserve salvation, and you can't earn it; so God offers it as a free gift. He sent Jesus to pay for your sins so you don't have to. And to receive God's forgiveness and the gift of eternal life all you have to do is believe.
  - x. The first lesson we learn from Rahab is that by faith, anyone can be saved.

## 2. Authentic faith is proven by works.

- i. Now this may confuse some of you, but it's important that understand.
- ii. The apostle James wrote about Rahab. He used her as an example of the truth that if your faith is real, then it will come out in your actions.
- iii. **James 2:25-26** "25 In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."
- iv. James used two examples to make this point. One was Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and the other was Rahab.
- v. The author of Hebrews is using Rahab as an example of faith. How do we know that she had faith? She didn't just say she believed in God; she did something about it. She protected the Israelite spies at the risk of her own life.
- vi. James is not contradicting the verses in the Bible that say that we are saved by faith and not by works (Eph 2:8-9). He is saying that if your faith is genuine, then your life will show it. Your life will be changed.
- vii. Yes, we are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone. Faith is never lonely. If you truly believe, then your life will change.
- viii. **Vance Havner** "What I do today is what I really believe; everything else is just religious talk."
- ix. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). When you put your faith in Jesus, the Spirit of God takes up residence in your heart, and He produces fruit in your life – love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, self-control, etc. (Gal 5:22-23). When you put your faith in Jesus, an inner transformation will take place. You will not become perfect, but you will change, and keep changing.
- x. Here's the problem. There are a lot of people that believe in Jesus, but their lives haven't changed. That's not true faith. Those people aren't saved. That's demonic faith. The demons believe in Jesus, but they are not Christians (James 2:19).

- xi. I heard a story about a young man who was hired to be the youth pastor of a church in Arlington, TX. He moved from one of the largest churches in Tennessee to Texas to enter the PhD program at SWBTS, where I went to seminary. He was very talented, musical, smart, athletic, handsome, articulate. He and the pastor became very close. They golfed and played tennis together. But over time the pastor felt that there was something off about the young man's spirit, but he couldn't put his finger on it, until he was told that the young man had left his wife for a married seminary student. Very quickly the pastor had him in his office. "Is this true?" "Yes." "Have you slept with her?" Not yet. "Do you understand that this is a grave sin against God?" "God will forgive us." Now I'm not saying that true Christians never sin, but that is not the attitude of someone who has true faith. True faith is proven by works; by lifestyle; by your obedience and your attitude toward God and others.
- xii. The scary thing is that that youth pastor knew a lot about Jesus, believed in Jesus, was deeply involved in church, but was very possible unsaved.
- xiii. It's my prayer that we don't have any people in our church like that; people who think they are saved but they aren't, because their faith is not real.
- xiv. This is the message a lot of people hear at church: "If you want to go to heaven and not go to hell, just believe in Jesus." So they say, "Okay; I believe in Jesus." To them, faith is just life insurance.
- xv. That's not saving faith. If your life has not been transformed, if you don't deeply love the Lord, if your deepest desire is not to please the Lord, if you don't hate your sin, then your faith is dead.

### **3. Faith takes great risks for God.**

- i. Let's recall what Rahab did. The Israelite spies were staying in her house. When the king's men knocked on her door, she hid the men on her roof, and then she covered for them and said that they had already left, and then in the middle of the night she helped them escape through the window.

- ii. This was a great risk for her. If it was discovered that she was lying, she and her entire family would have been executed.
- iii. Why did she take such a great risk? Faith. She had faith in the God of Israel. She believed that God had given the land to the Hebrews, and that Jericho would fall. She knew that her only change of long-term survival was to side with Israel.
- iv. Faith takes great risks for God.
- v. **John Piper** wrote a chapter on risk in his book *Don't Waste Your Life*.
  1. What is risk? "I define risk very simply as an action that exposes you to the possibility of loss or injury. If you take a risk you can lose money, you can lose face, you can lose your health or even your life. And what's worse, if you take a risk, you may endanger other people and not just yourself (p. 79)."
  2. "Why is there such thing as risk?... Risk is possible because we don't know how things will turn out (p. 80)."
- vi. With that said, that means that risk is inevitable if you are going to be a faithful Christian. When you attempt something for God, it's a risk because you don't know how things will turn out. When you obey God, it's a risk because you don't know how things will turn out. When you witness to someone, or take a stand for what is right, it's a risk because you don't know how it will turn out.
- vii. If you never take any risks for God, then you don't have faith.
- viii. When Lydia and I started Church Acadiana, it was a huge risk. We moved to Lafayette after seminary with a two-year-old, a one-year-old, and one in the oven. We didn't have any money. I didn't know how I was going to support the family. We didn't know how we were going to reach people. We didn't know where our little church was going to meet. I didn't know how to pastor a church. We took a huge risk because we had faith – faith that God would catch us if we fell; faith that God loved the people of Acadiana; faith that without Christ, people go to hell; faith that God has commanded Christians to fulfill the Great Commission; faith that



best way to reach people for Christ is to start new churches; faith in the power of the gospel to change lives.

- ix. Faith takes great risks for God.
- x. Let me ask you some questions:
  - 1. Are you hesitating to obey God because it's too risky?
  - 2. Are you hesitating to attempt something for Christ because it's too risky?
- xi. Listen to the words of Pastor Erwin McManus.
- xii. **Erwin McManus** said, "Somewhere along the way the movement of Jesus Christ became civilized a Christianity. We created a religion using the name of Jesus Christ and convinced ourselves that God's optimal desire for our lives was to insulate us in a spiritual bubble where we risk nothing, sacrifice nothing, lose nothing, worry about nothing... God's will for us is less about our comfort than it is about our contribution. God would never choose for us safety at the cost of significance. God created you so that your life would count, not so that you count the days of your life."
- xiii. Someone might say, "Rahab's risk of faith paid off because she and her family were saved. But it doesn't always pay off." Wrong. Taking great risks for God always pays off – if not in this life, then in the next. God sees everything you do, and He records it in His books, and He will reward you for it.
- xiv. But if you don't take great risks for God, you'll lose the rewards. You'll live with regret. And you'll always wonder about what might have been.
- xv. There's something else about Rahab that I haven't told you. Rahab's name is found in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.
  - 1. **Matthew 1:5** "Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered King David."
  - 2. After this story Rabha's were invited into the Jewish community, where Rahab married a Jewish man named Salmon. Their descendant was King David, and ultimately

Jesus Christ. Because she took a great risk for God, she became one of Christ's direct ancestors.

#### 4. Faith is uncommon.

- i. **Hebrews 11:31** "By faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed."
- ii. Rahab lived in Jericho, a city with thousands and thousands of people. They had all about Israel, and Israel's God. They had all heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea so they could walk through. They had all heard how they completely destroyed Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings. They had all heard that God promised to give the land to Israel. But only one person believed – Rahab.
- iii. Faith is uncommon. Not many people have it.
- iv. Nobody likes to be odd. We all like to fit in. Do you remember when Yeti cups first came out? Everyone got one. You had to have one. But then the Stanley cups came out, and if you didn't have a Stanley cup, you were old-school. If you were still sipping your water from a Yeti cup, you are weird. You are not cool. So everyone is racing to get a Stanley cup because we don't want to be the odd ball.
- v. This is what makes faith so challenging. Not many people have it. If you have faith, you will be different. You won't have many people walking with you. There will be times when you will stand alone.
- vi. During the peak of the Black Lives Matter movement, the ideology had infiltrated professional sports. In the NBA, the entire staff and team of the Orlando Magic were wearing the T-shirt and kneeling during the national anthem before games. I'm sure many didn't agree with the movement, or didn't really care about it, but they just went along with it to not make waves. Nobody wants to make waves. Nobody wants to stick out. Nobody wants to draw negative attention to themselves. But there was one player who was different – Jonathan Isaac, a strong, outspoken Christian. He disagreed with the movement, and so he refused to wear the t-

shirt, and he refused to kneel for the anthem. On his entire team, he was the only one standing.

- vii. If you want to have strong faith, you have to be willing to be the only one standing. You have to be willing to be different. You have to be willing to stand out, to make waves, to be the oddball. Because faith is uncommon.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

1. As we close today, I want to ask you a question. If you died today, are you 100% sure that you'd go to heaven? You can be. No matter who you are or what you've done. God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins so that you could be forgiven and receive eternal life. And you can receive that eternal life today. How? It's as simple as A, B, C.
2. A – Admit you are a sinner in need of a Savior.
3. B – Believe in Jesus Christ, that He died for your sins and rose again.
4. C – Call on Jesus to save you right now.