

A spy story with a difference...

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 July 2016

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, I don't know about you, but I love a good spy story. Don't you? I mean, who doesn't like, who doesn't enjoy watching James Bond driving an Aston Martin at 150 down a mountain road being chased by attack helicopters, shooting rockets out his headlights?

Oh, it's great escapism, isn't it? It's just good fun. Although most of the movies we watch, the spy movies, unfortunately aren't really a reflection of what real spy work is all about.

In fact, the best spy stories I find are the true ones, true stories, the real ones. And there are many out there, stories of real people who take crazy risks to gather intelligence on their enemies without being detected.

And some amazing, intriguing stories come out of that world. I just read a book called *Recce*, in fact. It's not quite a spy story, but it's got a lot of similar situations.

And it talks about South African special forces in the border war. Guys who went out, just two of them, behind enemy lines and camped out in the bush for weeks at a time, spying on the enemy without being detected.

[1 : 08] Sometimes they would be right outside the enemy base and no one would know about them. Amazing stories of these guys and the courage they had and the risks they took.

Well, we've just started working through the book of Joshua, as you would have picked up from Penny's reading. And right here in the second chapter, right as we're starting the book, we come across another spy story, an intriguing spy story, another great story of human courage and risk-taking, of two men infiltrating deep behind enemy lines.

And it's a true story. But this is a spy story with a difference. And that is that it's in the Bible. And the fact that it's in the Bible means that it's not just here to entertain us. It's not just here to make a good Sunday school story to keep our kids entertained.

That's not what it's for. It's here to teach us. It's here to teach us something for our lives today. And we must understand that nothing in the Bible is random. Everything that God's put in the Bible is intentional.

Every passage, every paragraph is intended by God to teach us something, to say something into our lives. And we've got to read the Bible with that expectation. Especially a story like this, which we could just read maybe and pass over.

[2 : 20] We've got to stop and ask, what is God trying to say through this story to us? What could it possibly mean for us today? Well, let's find out.

If you were here last week, you'll know the situation. You'll know the context. The Israelites under Joshua's leadership are camped just outside the land that God has promised to give them after 40 years of wandering through the desert.

But first, we saw last week, they will need to fight for it. They'll need to get ready for battle to fight for this land that God has promised. It's still full of nasty enemies, the Canaanites, who are overdue for God's judgment.

In fact, God's judgment on these evil people has been hundreds and hundreds of years in waiting. And they're about to face that judgment in the form of this Israelite army who are about to cross the Jordan River.

But now, in chapter 2, before they do that, Joshua decides prudently to send out two spies into the land to see just what they're up against. And we're told that these spies find their way in secret to one of the largest cities in the region, Jericho, and they end up in a brothel.

[3 : 26] Not, however, to use the services. Most likely, they went there to avoid being detected because that's where travelers would often go. It was quite popular with travelers, as you can imagine.

And so they wouldn't stand out being two strangers in this brothel. And they thought, oh, this is very clever. You know, if we stay here, no one will know we're here. And in the very next verse, we read that the whole city knows that they're there.

I don't know if they maybe weren't very good spies, but they got detected quite soon. And, you know, it didn't take long for the Jericho counter espionage unit to track them down, find out where they were. They told the king of Jericho, and they sent out a team to arrest them.

And so while these spies are hiding out, sitting pretty in the brothel, thinking no one knows about them, just outside the doors of this brothel come a group of armed men to capture them.

And I don't want to tell you what Canaanites would do with captured spies. Let's leave that to the imagination, but it's not pretty. And at this point in the story, it seems, as we read it, it seems as if they're done for.

[4 : 25] These two spies, they've had it. They've been discovered. It's game over. But then there's a twist, as there is in every spy story. Something very unexpected happens.

Help comes to them from a most unlikely source, a prostitute named Rahab, for no apparent reason, takes it upon herself to help these spies, knowing full well that they're enemies of her own people, and yet she helps them anyway.

She bundles them off to the back room and then opens the door to the Jericho police and plays dumb. You know, they say to her, Bring out these men who came to you and entered your house, because they've come to spy out the whole land. And she's like, Men?

Oh, those men. Yeah, yeah, they were here, but they left hours ago. You can still catch them up.

You know, if you go now, off you go, off you go. And then they turn around. And obviously she's such a good liar that they fell for it, and they went out of the city gate to chase these men.

And the spies could breathe a sigh of relief. They were spared for the meantime. Now, before we move on in the story, it's worth pointing out, this doesn't mean it's good to lie.

[5 : 32] All right? Let's just get that straight. The Bible doesn't actually commend the way that Rahab helped these spies, just as much as it doesn't commend her choice of career. It merely records it.

And we'll talk more about this in Bible study this week, so please do make that. But the real focus of this passage we need to understand this morning is not what Rahab did. It's why she did it.

What was her motivation to take these risks? That's what we're going to discover as we read the story, because the drama's not over yet. The Jericho police are temporarily out of the way, and so there's an opportunity, there's a window of opportunity opened up for these spies to escape.

But there's one major problem, which we read in verse 7. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. Whoopsie. Didn't see that one coming.

And now the spies were trapped inside the enemy city. But not to worry, because once more, guess what happens? It's Rahab who comes to the rescue. She takes a huge risk, not just in hiding these spies in her home.

[6 : 39] Every second they're there, they could be discovered, that she's hiding them and helping them. But she also goes the extra mile to arrange for their extraction through a window from her home, which of course could have been seen by some nosy neighbor.

And so it was a very risky thing for her to do. And then she doesn't only do that, but she plans a whole escape route for them to get back to their army. So this woman is doing what people would even hesitate to do for their own countrymen, let alone their enemies.

Which leaves us asking the question, why? Why would she do this? Because you see, that's what this whole story is really about. If you want to understand this chapter in Joshua, Joshua chapter 2, the center of it, in fact, literally in the middle of the chapter, is the reason why Rahab does these things.

And that's the key to understanding what's going on here. So it's there in verse 9 to 13. Sandwiched in the middle of this chapter that we find out because Rahab then opens her mouth and she explains to the spies why she's doing what she's doing.

And basically, the reason is because she believes that Israel's God is actually the true God. She's come to that conclusion. She knows that Israel's God is a powerful God and she knows that her city, Jericho, is in big trouble because of that.

[8 : 01] And so she quite cleverly wants to make a deal before that happens. So she's quite a shrewd woman. And perhaps she's believed this for a while.

She's believed she's had these convictions about God and Israel's God in particular. And maybe because of her lifestyle, she's lived with a little bit of guilt in the back of her mind always and she knows that she has to reckon with God one day.

And so she wants to get right before that happens. She wants to do something before that happens. And maybe when she sees the spies arrive at her door, she sees her opportunity to make a deal to save her own skin, to get on the right side of what's coming.

And that's the interesting thing about this passage, by the way. When we read it at first, we think it's a story about the spies being saved. But it's actually a story about Rahab being saved.

That's what's really going on here. And how, it's a story of how, Rahab was saved through her faith in the one true God. And because of that, you know what, Rahab is held up in the Bible as an example for us today.

[9 : 15] Despite being a lying prostitute, she's commended twice in the New Testament, once in Hebrews and once in James, which one of them, Alan read for us earlier.

And Rahab is presented as an example to Christians today. Not because of who she was and what she did necessarily. That's not important, who she was.

What's important is the faith that she had and how her faith is a model of what real, genuine, saving faith looks like today. And so for the rest of our time this morning, I just want to consider three aspects of Rahab's faith which need to be aspects of our faith in God too if it's going to be true saving faith.

And so let's see what they are. Firstly, Revelation. So where did this faith in Rahab, sorry, Rahab's faith in God come from? We've got to ask that.

Where, you know, was she just lying in bed one night and she suddenly decided to believe in Israel's God? No, I don't think so. In fact, in verse 9 we read this. I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear has fallen upon us so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

[10 : 29] We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt and what you did to Sion and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan whom you completely destroyed.

When we heard it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below. But just have a look.

See if you can see there what her faith is based on. Basically, basically she knew what she knew about Israel's God because she had heard it.

Did you notice that twice? She says, we've heard this, we've heard this. And in fact, not just her, but all of those in Jericho had heard about this God and how he was different from all the other gods because he had done things in history.

Things that were recorded that they could read. And the fact is, it's only because God had revealed himself in this way in history that Rahab believed in him and therefore helped the spies.

[11 : 30] Do you see the importance though? That her faith and her action was based on hearing about what this God had done. Not just ideas about this God, not just philosophies, not just religions, not just going to the temple and hearing about whatever, but based on actual things that God had done to reveal himself.

That's the key. Her faith was based on revelation. In other words, Rahab didn't just believe in Israel's God because it was some attractive notion or a nice idea or maybe it suited her lifestyle. In fact, we know it definitely didn't suit her lifestyle. That's not why she believed. She believed in this God because he was the only God who had actually revealed himself in history. That is key.

Because in the same way, Christians don't believe in God because it suits us. Don't think for a moment, if maybe you're visiting, maybe you're still exploring these things, maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian yet, but don't for a moment think that the people here, Christians, believe what we believe because it's a nice lifestyle option because it suits us.

It doesn't suit us. Let me tell you, it challenges us every day. We don't believe in God because it suits us. We believe in God because he's revealed himself in history in very real, tangible ways that we have recorded for us.

[12 : 49] And you've just got to read the Bible to see that. You know, unlike any other so-called religious writings, the Bible actually contains accurate historical records of things that God has done in this world.

And that is what makes it different. I don't know if you've ever had time to read like the Quran or the Vedas or the Bhagavad Gita, the other religious texts, and then read the Bible.

You'll find out that actually all those other so-called holy texts are just ideas of men. They're just philosophies and it's just boring, sorry to say, but those are just boring.

You open the Bible and suddenly you see history come alive. You see real things that have happened in our world with real people and how God has intervened in their life. But you see, most people don't want to read the Bible for fear of what they'll discover when they do and what it'll mean for them if God is proven to be true.

They think that ignoring the facts about God will make the facts go away, but they won't. Rahab didn't ignore the facts about God. She faced the facts. She was a realist and the Bible never calls people to just take a blind leap of faith.

[14:01] The Bible calls people to be realists and to face up to the facts about God and what He's revealed in this world and not live our lives ignoring the big things about God and what He said to us.

And, you know, so many people, even people who call themselves Christians and come to church, live their lives without reference to God and without reference to what He's done and who He is and what He calls us to do.

And that's not being realistic. That's being, that's living life with blinkers on. Well, Rahab didn't do that. Rahab is an example to us because she was a realist.

She took this God seriously because God had revealed Himself. And so true faith, we learn the first thing about true faith is it's based on revelation.

And let me tell you, if you're a Christian and you want to share your faith, this is something that I learned very early trying to share my faith as a Christian. the key to that is to open God's Word and expose people to God's revelation because it's only like Rahab when they're here for themselves, when they come across God for themselves, when they hear what He's done and who He is and what He said, that they will come to faith like Rahab did.

[15:16] Don't expect people to believe by taking a blind leap of faith. Nobody here takes a blind leap of faith. That's why we open up the Bible every Sunday so we can see what God has done.

So that was the first important element of Rahab's faith. The second was fear. Now this is a surprising one because we don't often associate faith with fear, do we?

But here we see they go hand in hand. Have a look at verse 9 again. I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

Okay, so Rahab admits that she was in fear and her people were in fear and the reason that faith and fear go hand in hand for Rahab is that when she faced the facts of this God who had revealed Himself to her she realized she was in trouble.

She was in big trouble as were all the people who lived in Jericho. You see, she didn't go to the length that she went to and risked what she risked just because she believed that Israel's God was real but also that He was angry and that He was coming and that He had a righteous anger for Jericho's sins and He was a just judge who wasn't going to sweep people's sins under the carpet and He was coming to judge and Rahab knew that and so she rightfully feared this God.

[16:46] and what's interesting about this is that remember her faith is held up to us as an example of true saving faith for us today which means that the same concept is true if a person is going to become a Christian and this is important especially when it comes to leading others to Jesus.

A person doesn't follow Jesus and make the sacrifices that are necessary to do that because let me say there aren't sacrifices necessary to follow Jesus He's not just a lifestyle option you can have on the side it's a whole life change it's giving your life over to Him if you're going to follow Him as your King and people don't do that because they just believe He exists you know lots of people believe in Jesus but are still quite happily living their own lives but that's not saving faith you see that's not the faith of Rahab saving faith is understanding that God is angry over our sins and that God is coming to judge and only when that hits us like a ton of bricks do we are we willing to make the sacrifices necessary like Rahab to do what's necessary to get out of that situation only when we realize that sin is real sin is real it's not just something we talk about in church it's real it's inside every one of our hearts and you know it and I know it and just look back on the past week what we've been thinking what we've been doing what we're ashamed of what we don't want anybody to hear sin is

real and judgment is real as well and so just as sure as God was going to judge Jericho then He is preparing right now to judge all people living and dead Acts tells us God has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed and He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead on God's calendar there is a day circled sometime in the future when God is coming to judge let's get realistic about that and unless you really believe that and unless you believe that you are a sinner and that you deserve God's eternal punishment for the countless ways that you've broken His holy law all the times that you've lied all the times that you've hated another person all the times that you've worshipped God's gifts and ignored Him all the times you've used His name in vain all the times you've indulged in lustful thoughts and actions all the times you've slandered someone else and gossiped or taken what doesn't belong to you all the ways that you've disqualified yourself over and over again for heaven unless you're realistic about those and you realize that you're in much more serious trouble than you think you won't ever come to Jesus in real saving faith you need to realize those things about yourself you need to be a realist like Rahab was she realized she was in trouble without help without salvation and so are we far more than we think you know the biggest obstacle I find today to people coming to Jesus is thinking that they're decent people that's the biggest mistake you can make thinking oh I'm okay I'm a decent upstanding member of society I've never murdered anyone I pay my taxes I recycle I try to cross the road at pedestrian crossings you know we think we're decent we think we make the cut and we fool ourselves don't fool yourself don't think that God will sweep your millions of sins under the carpet he's a God of justice he's a perfect and holy God and his standard is far higher than we think Rahab didn't fool herself you see into thinking she was okay with that God and that she didn't need rescue from his wrath don't make the same mistake don't make the same mistake as all those other people in Jericho did because it's only when you realize what a precarious position you're in eternally in and of yourself it's only then when you realize you really deserve

God's punishment when you sit down and actually realize without Jesus how much trouble you're in it's only when you realize that that you'll truly embrace God's mercy and it'll flow through you and you'll rejoice truly that you won't just come to church and sing because the songs are up there you'll sing out of your heart because you're so amazingly overwhelmed at what you've been rescued from because the truth is you see not only is God angry with sin and coming to judge which is real but he is also offering today to everybody he's offering a way out of that judgment before he comes that's why he hasn't come yet because he wants to give us a way out he did that for Rahab through these spies and he does it for you through the cross of Jesus who died for the sins of all of those who come and put their faith in him that is the way that you get out of God's judgment that's the way out that God is offering you and me today and you'll only ever really embrace Jesus and cling to him and love him when you first realize how much you really need that way out so do you do you realize that you're in desperate need of a way out of God's judgment do you realize how much trouble you're in without Jesus this morning because it's only when you really appreciate that and when your heart trembles with fear before a holy God like Isaiah the prophet and when you bow down and say

[22 : 47] I'm unworthy it's only when you get to that point that you'll truly embrace Jesus that your life will change that you will be converted you don't get converted just by coming to church and ticking boxes and saying you're a Christian you get converted by a healthy real fear of God driving you to Jesus Christ has that fear driven you to Jesus yet we've also got to remember that as I said earlier when we tell other people about Jesus if you're a Christian when you share your faith and you want people to come to the point you've come to and put their faith in Christ you must realize you've got to help them to see how much trouble they're in without him and that's an uncomfortable thing to do you know typically the comfortable way of sharing our faith is to go to someone and say you know you really should accept Jesus into your life because your life will be so much better if you accept Jesus he'll give you a peace in your heart and he'll make everything work well and you know church is great and fellowship amongst people there's coffee afterwards no that's not the reason you want people to come to Jesus you want people to come to Jesus because they're going to face his judgment one day and they need him and it's not comfortable to talk about sin is it it's not comfortable to talk about judgment but if we don't do that if we don't graciously but urgently talk about things like sin and judgment with the people in this world around us who is no one else is going to talk about those things no one else is going to help them to see reality we've got to be bold because true saving faith needs a healthy dose of fear that drives us to take refuge in Jesus and

then finally the third aspect of saving faith that we see here is action action you see revelation is not enough revelation is necessary but it's not sufficient believing that God exists is not enough by itself even a healthy dose of fear is not enough the rest of Jericho believed and were in great fear but they weren't spared from God's judgment we see later in Joshua why not because their fear didn't result in action like it did with Rahab and that's James' point in the New Testament he uses Rahab as an example of faith that leads to action and that is true faith because you see faith is pointless unless you act on that faith and that's what Rahab did and that's why she's an example to us she stepped out she took a risk and she did what was necessary to be saved and that's what

Jesus says that each of us need to do as well we need to step out and do what is necessary to be saved he's offering us that salvation he's done everything to make that salvation possible for us but we need to step out and take action in order to embrace that salvation for ourselves in Mark 8 Jesus says whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me for whoever wants to save their life will lose it but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it do you see what he's saying here it's so important if you want to save your life from God's judgment if you realize firstly that God's judgment is real and it's terrifying and if you want to save yourself from that judgment you need to lose your life here and now Rahab needed to make the decision to lose her life in Jericho to lose all her connections and friends and business interests in Jericho in order to find refuge under

Israel's protection and if you haven't yet you need to make the decision to lose your life in this world and find refuge in Jesus you can only enjoy his protection as your savior if you're willing to come under his authority as your king have you done that yet and if so if you've done that are you willing and ready to call others to that kind of saving faith too before it's too late let's not live our lives wasting time when there are millions of people around us who are going to face God's judgment and they're oblivious to the fact they're in a terrible dangerous situation and we need to warn them and are you willing to call them are you willing to urgently but graciously call them to a faith that is based in revelation of what God has shown himself a faith that comes through a right fear of God's judgment and a faith that results in stepping out and taking action well let's pray that that'll be our faith heavenly father we do thank you for your amazing word that is filled with so much the story of Rahab and how you use this as an example to show us saving faith we thank you for that this morning and we pray

Lord that we would have that same kind of faith we pray Lord I pray for everyone in here that we wouldn't leave this place without doing business with you Lord help us to realize the fearful judgment that we're due without Jesus help us to really put our faith in Jesus in a faith that results in action help us to go out in this week and follow Christ into eternal life and we pray this in Jesus name Amen let's try to plan to be first in Idaho and we because of the word it was to you for that even a fool I