

Yes, There Is Grace in the OT

Rescued by Grace Frankton – 6/21/15

Scripture: Joshua 2.8-14 The spies promise safety for Rahab

Proposition: Grace is slow to judge and quick to deliver grace

Today we continue a series I have titled [SLIDE] “Yes, There Is Grace in the Old Testament.” Many people look at the New Testament and see a God of love, then they look in the Old Testament expecting to see that same God of love, but all they see is a god of wrath. I think they are so wrong. Today, we’re going to talk about a woman who was rescued by grace.

So, the Israelites have left slavery in Egypt and under Moses’ guidance spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness waiting for God to let them go into the Promised Land. They are now camped on the east side of the Jordan River just a couple of miles from Jericho, which is in the Promised Land. And there are tens of thousands, some say as many as half a million to a million Israelites camped there. The people of Jericho can’t help but see them. Like any good military strategists, Joshua, the leader of the Israelite army, sent a couple of men to scout the terrain of Jericho, to check out its defenses, etc. Posing as travelers, the men found room and board with a prostitute named Rahab. Unfortunately, the spies were spotted and ratted out to the king of Jericho. While the king was sending troops over to arrest the men, Rahab hid them on the roof. She was risking her life because if the soldiers found the men in hiding, she would be arrested for treason and executed. When the soldiers got there, she lied to them saying they had been at her place, but they left in time to get out of the city before the gates closed at dusk. So the soldiers took off intent on catching the spies.

Soon after the soldiers leave, Rahab goes to the roof and tells the spies that the coast is clear. She then tells the spies that Jericho is living in fear of the Israelites camped on the opposite side of the Jordan, just a couple of miles away. They have heard how the God of Israel parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape Egypt. They have heard how the God of Israel helped the Israelites completely destroy two Amorite kingdoms. And now those same Israelites are camped just across the river and everyone in Jericho is afraid they will meet the same fate as the two Amorite kingdoms. Rahab finishes by saying: [SLIDE] *For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.* [11] Rahab just affirmed her personal belief that the one and only true God had given the land of Canaan to the Israelites.

Rahab responded differently to the Israelites encampment across the river than her did countrymen. While they were preparing for war; she surrendered and asked for protection. You see, just before the spies slipped away to return to camp, Rahab pleaded with the spies for the promise of safety for her and her family. She wanted assurances that she and her family would be safe during the battle. The two spies agreed. The men instructed Rahab to tie a scarlet cord in her window so that the Israelite army would know which apartment to spare during the battle. Anyone gathered in her quarters on that fateful day would be spared.

Ok, so you probably know the story of the fall of Jericho. I’m sure Joshua, who was a seasoned general by this point, had a plan to lay siege to Jericho and wait until her folks were dying of starvation or thirst before he would attack the city. However, God had a different plan. He told the

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Israelite army to march around the city once a day for six days with priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant and their shofars (ram's horns). Then on the seventh day, the Israelites were to march around the city seven times. Then, when the priests blew the Ram's horns, they were to give a loud shout and the walls would come tumbling down. It's an odd plan to say the least. But maybe there was grace even in this plan.

Maybe, just maybe, God had the Israelites march around Jericho for six days to give those living in the city a chance to change their mind and surrender peacefully. Maybe those six days gave more people a chance to find Rahab and live in her house so they could be spared. We'll never know. We do know that on the seventh day, Israel's army marched, the horns sounded, the walls came tumbling down, and Israel's army went on to destroy the city. During the pandemonium of battle, as houses burned and swords clashed, a small Hebrew squad rescued Rahab and all her family that was in her house that day.

Scripture leaves us with one last thought about Rahab: [SLIDE] *And she lives among the Israelites to this day.* [6.25] Don't overlook that line. It's incredibly important. A Canaanite prostitute, who otherwise would have been stoned under Israel's law recently given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, became an accepted member of the community, an adopted daughter of the covenant. By surrendering her illegitimate claim to the land as a Canaanite and by receiving God's gracious offer of mercy and forgiveness, Rahab became an adopted daughter in the family of God and an heir to Abraham's promise from God.

But her story doesn't end there! The Gospel of Matthew reveals that Rahab didn't merely live out her days on the outskirts of Israelite society, eating left-over milk and honey. Despite her sin – a stained past as a prostitute - a young man named Salmon saw in Rahab a beautiful woman of faith, and so he married her. Salmon and Rahab gave birth to a son, whom they named Boaz. And Boaz, perhaps influenced by the remarkable courage of his own parent's inter-ethnic marriage, married a widow from the country of Moab. Her name was Ruth. You've probably heard of her – there's a whole book devoted to her in the OT. Boaz and Ruth later became the great-grandparents of none other than King David.

No longer clinging for survival to the lowest rung of Canaanite society as a prostitute, Rahab instead became a member of the Hebrew community. In time, she ceased to be known as Rahab the Prostitute. To them, she became Rahab the wife of Salmon. Or Rahab the mother of Boaz. She eventually became a prominent figure in Hebrew history. She became the mother of Kings, an ancestor of the greatest dynasty the world will ever know. Moreover, the Messiah, the king of kings, would be born from her lineage. Generations would look upon Rahab as one of the most fortunate women ever to find refuge in the grace of God. In the end, Rahab received far more than she originally surrendered. She received grace heaped upon grace and divine favor beyond her wildest imagination.

Rahab's story illustrates the wonder and beauty of God's grace with fairy-tale drama. But for all its uniqueness, her story is not so much different from each of ours. Before Israel showed up outside the walls of Jericho, Rahab wore a [SLIDE] label. Her neighbors, fellow citizens, clients, and even her parents knew her as Rahab the Prostitute. The people of Jericho may not have attached to the label the same things we do, but I have no doubt she felt the indignity of her occupation. Regardless of their culture or religion, women typically do not become prostitutes unless they are forced to do

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so – physically, emotionally, or financially. But when given the opportunity between dying with her pagan countrymen and surrendering to God, she chose the latter. As a result, she eventually received a new label: Rahab the mother of kings.

In some ways, Rahab's story is our story. Each of us has a label. You may have had your label concealed for most of your life and prefer that it remain a secret. You deftly keep people from your past separated from those who know you now. You avoid reminiscing too much because your memories and your old label cause you shame. In fact, your label may cause you to shy away from approaching God. Perhaps your label is the reason you hesitate to become more active in the church. If that's the case consider the following: Isn't it interesting that when the Israelite spies offered to spare Rahab's life, they said nothing about changing her lifestyle? Abandoning her trade was not part of the deal. Rahab's label was not an obstacle to God, and neither is yours. The reality and the embarrassment your label reflects is not an obstacle to God's grace. You, like Rahab, are invited as you are, label and all. You, like Rahab, have been invited to join God in a relationship initiated by faith, not adherence to a set of rules.

This is the way of grace. And this is the way it has been from the beginning. Grace doesn't require people with embarrassing labels to shed those labels as a prerequisite for receiving grace. Grace is what empowers us to shed our labels. Grace doesn't demand that we change our ways. Grace assists in the change. When you look at Rahab's story the message is unmistakable: **[SLIDE]** When it comes to your labels, God is slow to judge and quick to deliver grace. Grace comes, not after you've freed yourself or distanced yourself from your embarrassing labels, but as a part of that process. In fact, grace provides you with labels of its own: forgiven, accepted, loved.

We don't know how long it took Rahab to completely shake her past. We don't know how long it was before she no longer viewed herself through the lens of her past behavior. My guess is that it was a process – a process that took time but that ended with her fully embracing her new life, her new identity, and her new standing with God. In the same way, it may take you some time before you can put away your label once and for all. But in the meantime, I want to encourage you to begin renewing your mind to the new labels that are yours through the grace of your heavenly father: **[SLIDE]** forgiven, accepted loved.