Rahab: “Bad for a season but not forever”

Proposition:
This morning we turn to the fourth Bad Girl in our holiday series. Next week we will look again at the book of Ephesians and especially what men can do to ensure that they have a happy wife, which in turn will translate to a happy life.

The Bible recalls real stories of real people discovering God and growing in their faith and consequently there is lots we can learn from their experiences.

There is a lot we can learn from today’s bad girl, a prostitute by the name of Rahab.

I look at Rahab’s story and how this moral failure of a person became an integral part of the children of Israel, how she eventually marries one of the two spies and is King David’s great, great Grandmother. She is included in the role of honour in Hebrews 11. Looking at her story, you have to conclude that with God, no matter how bad your past was, there are no limits to how good your future can be.

Prostitutes were considered scum in their day. Men might visit them in the night but those same shallow men would not even look at, or talk to, a prostitute during the light of day. The Greek word for prostitute is porne.

Rahab didn’t have a husband or children but she had parents and brothers and sisters. Her family, however, lived in a different part of town; it would not have been good for business to have them living with her.

Rahab was a woman who knew how to manipulate men. She knew how they thought, how they behaved and what they wanted.

Also, historians and commentators have suggested that Rahab was one of the four most beautiful women in the ancient world along with Sarah, Abigail and Esther.

Picture this. The city of Jericho was a well fortified city. And yet as the people in it heard the stories of a supernatural God who can part the Red Sea, of a God who gave His people, the Israelites, stunning victories over the neighbouring kingdoms of Sihon and Og, this was a city on high alert. Yes they were very well fortified, but they knew that they were next in the sights for this advancing army, and they were scared.

Joshua chose two men as spies and sent them from their camp at Acacia with these instructions: “Go across the river and find out as much as you can about the whole region, especially about the town of Jericho.”

The two spies left the Israelite camp at Acacia and went to Jericho, where they decided to spend the night at the house of a prostitute named Rahab.

I would imagine that these two spies that Joshua picked to spy out the city of Jericho were sharp young men. I imagine they were devout Jews who knew to keep away from stray women. So why go to Rahab’s house as soon as they arrive in the city?

In order to get from the camp at Acacia they would have had to swim the Jordan river, then walk about 2.5kms to get to Jericho. Jericho was well known for its fortified walls; two huge walls set about 4.5 metres apart that surrounded the whole city. They would have looked different from locals and if they spoke they sure would have sounded different. They stood out. Which is not a good thing for a spy. Nestled between these two great walls were houses. Rahab’s bed and breakfast with benefits would have been right beside the city gate. It was a place where men would come and go all the time, unnoticed. Its roof overlooked the city and gave a great vantage point to study it. It was perfect for their purposes.

And yet someone must have spotted these guys going into her house.

2 But someone found out about them and told the king of Jericho, “Some Israelite men came here tonight, and they are spies.” 3-7 So the king sent soldiers to Rahab’s house to arrest the spies.
Rahab is in serious trouble. People had seen enemies of the state enter her home and everyone expected her to be patriotic and turn them in. If she didn’t she would have been at risk of losing her life.

But she didn’t. Even though she had lived her life as a bad girl, God was doing something in her heart. People all around her believed in many gods but God was moving her to put her trust in the One true God, the God of the Israelites.

I once worked for a grumpy bank manager who would say; this is just the way I am, I can’t change. The thing is, when people are praying, when folk are open to the Holy Spirit, that isn’t true. Bad people can become awesome people.

Example of Bob.

Meanwhile, Rahab had taken the men up to the flat roof of her house and had hidden them under some piles of flax plants that she had put there to dry.

This lady is a seriously brave girl.

So she risks her life to hide men she had only just met and lies to protect them and I guess herself as well.

The soldiers came to her door and demanded, “Let us have the men who are staying at your house. They are spies.”

She answered, “Some men did come to my house, but I didn’t know where they had come from. They left about sunset, just before it was time to close the town gate. I don’t know where they were going, but if you hurry, maybe you can catch them.”

The guards at the town gate let the soldiers leave Jericho, but they closed the gate again as soon as the soldiers went through. Then the soldiers headed toward the Jordan River to look for the spies at the place where people cross the river.

Rahab risked her life for two men that she didn’t even know. She hid them under some flax that she was drying on the roof and lied for them. She risked her life for them. Why would anyone do that for two strangers?

8 Rahab went back up to her roof. The spies were still awake, so she told them:

9 I know that the LORD has given Israel this land. Everyone shakes with fear because of you. 10 We heard how the LORD dried up the Red Sea so you could leave Egypt. And we heard how you destroyed Sihon and Og, those two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River. 11 We know that the LORD your God rules heaven and earth, and we’ve lost our courage and our will to fight.

Rahab would have been raised to worship Baal or Ashtoreth or Moloch and yet she says; “I know that the Lord has given Israel this land.” … “I know that the Lord your God rules heaven and earth,…”

Rahab has heard of the God of the Israelites, she has believed in the God of the Israelites and now that belief is resulting in actions of faith and courage. It strikes me that is how real faith usually develops, you hear about the Lord, you believe and then you live differently.

James in the NT said this about Rahab:

James 2:24-25 (CEV)

24 You can now see that we please God by what we do and not only by what we believe. 25 For example, Rahab had been a prostitute. But she pleased God when she welcomed the spies and sent them home by another way.

James would also write that faith that doesn’t result in action is dead; it isn’t real faith at all.

Rahab was on a journey to believing in the One true God even before these two spies divinely sent set foot on her door step. My experience, with most pre-Christians, is that before I speak to them, in most cases, God has already been at work in some way drawing those people to Himself, instilling in them the desire to know more.

God was already at work and these spies were simply part of God’s plan, part of His strategy to save her physically and Spiritually. Rahab had in her heart not just a desire to be saved herself but the wellbeing of her whole family.
Please promise me in the LORD’s name that you will be as kind to my family as I have been to you. Do something to show that you won’t let your people kill my father and mother and my brothers and sisters and their families.

“Rahab,” the spies answered, “if you keep quiet about what we’re doing, we promise to be kind to you when the LORD gives us this land. We pray that the LORD will kill us if we don’t keep our promise!”

Rahab wanted her family saved as well. And that is true of all of us, isn’t it. We want to step out in faith and experience God’s favour but .. we want that for our relatives as well. These two spies were quick to agree to the proposal, as long as she didn’t talk to anyone about their plans. This wasn’t a written contract but a verbal agreement where the spies and Rahab trusted each other to keep their side of the agreement.

Rahab’s house was built into the town wall, and one of the windows in her house faced outside the wall. She gave the spies a rope, showed them the window, and said, “Use this rope to let yourselves down to the ground outside the wall. Then hide in the hills. The men who are looking for you won’t be able to find you there. They’ll give up and come back after a few days, and you can be on your way.”

How many ladies keep a rope in their house. A long and strong rope, strong enough to hold a man’s weight. I wonder how many cheating husbands or community figures had left her house via the rope exit in the past?

You made us promise to let you and your family live. We will keep our promise, but you can’t tell anyone why we were here. You must tie this red rope on your window when we attack, and your father and mother, your brothers, and everyone else in your family must be here with you. We’ll take the blame if anyone who stays in this house gets hurt. But anyone who leaves your house will be killed, and it won’t be our fault.

“I'll do exactly what you said,” Rahab promised. Then she sent them on their way and tied the red rope to the window.

As soon as they leave, even though they are going to hide in the hills for a couple of days, she ties this scarlet cord or ribbon in her window. Like the Christian who is ready for Christ to return any day any time, this girl is ready.

What comes to mind when you think of a scarlet cord?

What springs to mind when you hear the colour scarlet?

This colour was like a public declaration of her sinfulness.

The bible describes sins as being like scarlet.

People associate this colour with seduction and sexual sin. We used to talk about red light districts etc.

Rahab’s sins were like a scarlet ribbon hung out of her window, a declaration of who she was but as she repented and left her old life behind those sins would become white as snow.

She was willing to confess her sin, to put it out there, and that ribbon would have also served as a clear sign to the conquering Israeli forces.

One of the amazing things to me about Israel’s conquest of Jericho was that after they had marched around the city seven times, when the Priests blew their trumpets and the people shouted all of the walls of Jericho fell down, except for this tiny section, where a woman with a new faith had hung a red ribbon out of her window.

They killed everyone, men and women, young and old, everyone except Rahab and the others in her house. They even killed every cow, sheep, and donkey.

Joshua said to the two men who had been spies, “Rahab kept you safe when I sent you to Jericho. We promised to protect her and her family, and we will keep that promise. Now go into her house and bring them out.”

Joshua 6:25 (CEV)
The two men went into Rahab’s house and brought her out, along with her father and mother, her brothers, and her other relatives. Rahab and her family had to stay in a place just outside the Israelite army camp. But later they were allowed to live among the Israelites, and her descendants still do.

Not only were they allowed into the camp and became fully part of the family of faith but Matthew 1:5-6 recalls how Rahab married one of the spies called Salmon, became King David’s great, great grandmother and one of Jesus’ ancestors.

A great woman. Bad, really bad for a season but not for good.

Friends, I believe in a God who is constantly reaching out to people.

I believe in God who can change the roughest stone into a diamond.

I believe in a God who loves to take people who have struggled and failed and make them into something great and impacting on the community.

I believe that though there are seasons when it seems some one is too tough, to bad, to anti to ever be a Christian, that God loves those people and God can change them also as we enter their homes and circle of friends.

There are some powerful lessons we can learn from Rahab that many of us and so many in our community need to know:

1. **Our past does not determine our future.**
   It doesn’t matter how badly you have failed morally or as a parent or as a business person; if you have not played the blame game but acknowledged your sin and turned from it, God can make you a new beginning. It is offered to us all as a gift if we put our trust in the Lord.

2. **Your faith will help your whole family.** It seems clear to me that her family didn’t deserve to be saved. There is no mention that they turned to faith, that they humbled themselves, that they even thanked God. But they were all save physically. Your faith, whether your family are there yet or not, will bring real benefits to your family. Your life will be a holy influence to steer them away from foolish decisions, your love a vehicle of healing and reconciliation, your example and words a testimony that there is a God and that there is real purpose and meaning to life. And your prayers are powerful in bringing them revelation of who Jesus is.

3. **Faith that is demonstrated is remembered.**
   
   *James 2:26 (CEV)*
   
   26 Anyone who doesn’t breathe is dead, and faith that doesn’t do anything is just as dead!

What will your life be remembered for?

Rahab came to faith quickly and then quickly put her faith into risky action. She risked her life to save those spies, and do what seemed like the God honouring thing to do.

I sometimes wonder if God would say of our generation, "They had so much information, they did so many courses, but they were afraid of taking risks of faith." I hope not. But this I do know, every day God will drop ideas in your head, whisper suggestions about what you should say or do and give. How easy it is for us to brush aside that still, quiet voice and go with what is safe and familiar. I don’t think the adventure with God is ever found in playing it safe or in doing what everyone else does.

What has God been asking you to do?

Rahab will forever be remembered and honoured, not because she was once a prostitute, but because there came a day when God required of her faith and courage, and on that day, Rahab, King David’s great Grandmother, Jesus’ ancestor, stepped up to the plate and put her faith into action.