

Surprised by Grace

Joshua 2

Introduction: Have you ever been genuinely surprised? An unexpected gift, raise, promotion, proposal, or party? Some people love surprises, while others do not like the feeling of the unexpected, but surprises happen all the time. Every so often I like to crouch by the stairwell and "surprise" our secretaries as they are walking up (they love this, I'm sure). Some surprises are expected (try catching your girlfriend off guard for a marriage proposal), while others are come completely out of left field and were not on the radar at all (like getting a promotion out of nowhere or the Seahawks being in the Super Bowl). Those are the best surprises.

Grace is that kind of surprise. The best kind. The kind that is unexpected. The kind that when we reflect on the gift we immediately realize that we did not deserve it. Grace comes in amazing ways, and though we never should presume on grace, we wait hopefully, expectantly that God will lavish grace on us. Grace by nature is an undeserved gift, receiving something we did not earn. Grace defines God's nature and character as well as how He acts, knowing that every good thing in this world is a result of God's grace shining on us (see Numbers 6:25-26; Matt. 5:44-45; James 1:17). God's grace not only keeps us alive, but it actually motivates us to live. God's grace needs to be understood to fully understand God's wrath and justice so that we have a complete and proper view of God.

This is exactly what Israel needed to understand as they stood gazing across the Jordan river at the Promised Land.

God calls His people to choose: From the beginning of Joshua to the end, the call to Israel is to make a choice of service: **choose today whom you will serve** – God is not whiney and insecure. He tells all the people through Joshua to consider all the other gods and idols, and in light of them to put away those god's and serve the true and Living God (Joshua 24:14-15). This choice was not to be taken lightly because God is a jealous God (24:19), and was a choice that would continue to make a million other choices (much like the choice to love in marriage). We know that this choice is for those who have been chosen, who's eyes have been opened, hearts softened, and who have been transferred from death to life. We live now in newfound freedom to please God, love Him, serve Him, and glorify Him because we have been reconciled to Him (2 Cor. 5:17)

The Story of Rahab in particular: *an intriguing story within a story*

God reminds His people of who He is: - Who is this God that we serve? Who is the One that we lay our life down for? Joshua chapter 2 is unique in this narrative because you can throw it out and you would not miss the main part of the story. Rahab is the first person mentioned outside of Joshua himself, but why include her in this recounting of the conquest? It has to be more than a moral undertaking of situational ethics. ***It has to do with God revealing Himself to His people, assuring them, comforting and encouraging them.*** He reassured Joshua that He would never leave Him or forsake Him, that no one would stand before Him, and that just as He was with Moses, He would be with him (Josh. 1:5). He reassured Joshua at the end of chapter 2 that the people of the land were really ready for conquering, hearing that the hearts were melting because of God's work (Josh. 2:24) – like a reassuring letter from a spouse. **But there is something more:** there would be an amazing amount of judgment and wrath poured out. Conquering the land would include a bloodbath of destruction, which was necessitated for Israel living as light in the land and the sin of the Amorites (Gen. 15:16). Israel had finished off Sihon and Og on the Eastern side of the Jordan (see Numbers 21; 32; Deut. 1:4; 3:1ff for an account of the

destruction of the Amorites). Before the Jordan river, they left no survivors...at the end of Josh 6 we see the same thing in Jericho: **mass destruction**. Even though it was necessary, it was overwhelming. They needed to be reassured of something else: ***in the midst of destruction and wrath, God's grace is greater, it's evident, and real.***

This is something we need to return to often. We rightly uphold God's justice, holiness, glory, and wrath. Often this is so underemphasized that we need to introduce it to people, **but we can never forget that God is a God of lavish grace poured out on sinners like you and me.**

Situation:

Two spies were sent out to report on the condition of the city in preparation for the attack that was to take place in a few days.

Since the people of Jericho saw and heard that Israel was forming across the river, this needed to be a secret mission, not attracting a lot of attention.

Jericho was a walled city, with most likely an outer wall, which lead up an embankment, with another wall in the middle. The city had people living inside as well as outside, and in times of war, those outside the walls would huddle inside. It had an impenetrable wall as well as a standing army (Joshua 6:2), and a king to lead them. They were wicked but an advanced people.

The spies had to travel north up the Jordan (since it was flooding) come around the West side of the city, and enter there, not on the East, since they would be expecting this.

I. Grace Saves Because it is God's Nature

A. Rahab was reached at an unexpected time

The two spies were sent on a military mission, one of reconnaissance, so these were most likely trusted and trained men. Immediately in this story, there is a fact that makes good, moral people to raise an eyebrow: they entered into the house of a prostitute. The question has two clear answers: one was strategic, the other was providential.

Why would they go into a prostitutes house?

- She had access to much information
- People would not ask too many questions, since strange men usually went into this house
- It was located on the outskirts of the city, meaning they could have a quick get away.
- God directed them there, not only to accomplish their mission, but to accomplish His. In the midst of a military mission, a redemptive mission broke out. These men were sent to spy out the best way to destroy a city, to gather intel, and offload that information to military leaders. Yet in the middle of this campaign, God showed that His purposes and intentions are not always what we would expect. And to the surprise of everyone (including the two spies) they met a woman named Rahab who was ready, prepared, and waiting for salvation.

B. Grace causes us to live in hopeful expectation

Matthew 28:18-19 - And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

This illustrates God's means of bringing salvation. It is clear He is the One who brings salvation, but He uses us as instruments to put hands and feet to the message of salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are called to live lives of worship, or service, and of caring for our families, and the outflow of all of this should be a passion and expectation that God will save the nations, and that somehow He will use us to reap His harvest.

This is also **HOPE IN MISSIONS** – How will God save those in **N. Korea** who cannot hear the message of God's Word in the open? How will God save Muslims in places of fear and control? How will God save those in the furthest reaches of the world. He will save them in ways that may not be by conventional ways, but He will get them to a point of repentance of sin and the yielding in faith to Christ through knowledge of Him. The question for all of us is this: are we ready share, disciple, and love when God brings someone to Himself? Are we going about life on one mission (work, paying bills, raising kids, etc) but miss a greater mission? We need to do the normal things in life, but we always have an expectant eye on what God will do in our midst.

II. **Grace Saves Anyone**

A. **Rahab was the least likely candidate**

God saves those who have no business being saved. His economy of worthiness is categorically different than ours. We rank people on a scale that we invent, typically based on what we value the most. God sees the worthiness of people based on His value of holiness, and on that scale, we ALL fall short (Rom. 3:23). This places us all on a platform in need of God's grace alone. We see this through the lens of God saving someone like Rahab:

Remember, Rahab was a:

- **Gentile** - God's chosen people was the nation of Israel (Deut. 7:6-11) and those outside of this people would need the light of God for salvation
- **Amorite** – singled out for destruction because of their sin (Gen 15:16)
- **Prostitute** - there is no sugar-coating her occupation. Though it seems like she had a good relationship with her family (she wanted them to be saved when Israel came) this was a way of life that was looked at the way that it is today. She was a woman who sold her body for money, to be able to make a livable wage.
- **Living in the midst of a wicked world** – Rahab had faith in the midst of a total culture that stood against her. This was a people who were idolatrous, wicked to the core, and worshippers of all kinds of foreign gods.

Rahab was the most likely of people to be saved, to be brought into a relationship with God, and to live among His people. But this is exactly how God works.

B. **Grace shatters our paradigm of worthiness**

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 For consider your calling, brothers: **not many of you were wise** according to worldly standards, **not many were powerful**, **not many were of noble birth**.²⁷ But God chose what is **foolish** in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is **weak** in the world to shame the strong;²⁸ God chose what is **low** and **despised** in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,²⁹ **so that no human being might boast in the presence of God**.³⁰ He is the source of your life

in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

³¹ Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

God's grace saves those who are unworthy, those who know they are sick, and those who understand their need for a Savior (Matt. 9:12-13). Rahab was saved in part because she knew she needed something/Someone outside of herself to bring her salvation. It is the same with us. We must come to grips with and remember that salvation IS NOT FROM US, it is not because we are worthy or good, but because we finally realize that we CANNOT save ourselves. This is why Jesus spoke out to the religious leaders of His day and why Paul criticized the prideful folks in the church at Corinth. Salvation is not based on something that we do but on something that God did in Jesus Christ. We are anything only because of what God does, and that is what we boast in.

III. **Grace Saves by Faith Alone**

A. **Rahab was saved by radical faith (Josh. 2:8-14)**

Rahab was saved by hanging a scarlet cord out of her window, but her salvation came from faith alone. This is amazing since she was living in a foreign land and did not even know any true believers in God. This illustrates how amazing grace gives us the ability to believe:

- **She responded to something propositional** – in other words, she responded to the stated, rational, and logical truth about God. The irony of this is how she came to this knowledge. Most likely she heard from her patrons about the work of God beyond the Jordan and in Egypt. She heard the tales of people coming through, and God opened her eyes and heart to believe in the God she learned about.
- **She put her life on the line** - Her faith caused her to obey God, and though she did not do this perfectly (since she lied in the process), her obedience was based on her faith in the God she knew was the true One. She did this in a radical, all in decision, risking everything: her business, family, welfare, and life to follow the God she knew to be true.

James 2:25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Hebrews 11:31 By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

- **She turned from her past life to a new people** (1 Thess. 1:10) - She turned from the life she was living, and the gods of the land, to pursue the true God. This is exactly what Paul described what happened in the city of Thessalonica, and it is what we call *repentance*, a turning from one way of life to follow another.

B. **Grace works through God-given faith**

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Salvation is by grace alone, and that grace awakens our minds and hearts to faith, to believe in God for salvation. There is no way we would have chosen God without Him first making us alive, since we were dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3). But this faith is more than simply believing the facts of

Jesus and God. It is a yielding of life, a laying down of our old life, and following Jesus with our whole heart. What we see in Rahab's life is still what grace through faith looks like.

IV. **Grace Saves to Full Family Status**

A. Rahab became a part of the Messianic line

1 Chron. 2:10-11 - Ram fathered Amminadab, and Amminadab fathered **Nahshon**, prince of the sons of Judah. ¹¹ Nahshon fathered **Salmon**, Salmon fathered Boaz, ---- OBED ---- Jesse ----- David

Matthew 1:4-6 - and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of **Nahshon**, and Nahshon the father of **Salmon**, ⁵ and Salmon the father of **Boaz by Rahab**, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

The story of Rahab does not end in Joshua. The reason why this passage was included becomes more and more clear as we see how all of Scripture unfolds. Rahab's faith saved her life and the life of her family. She acted on her faith and trusted a God that she came to know, and in that act was able to leave the people she knew for a new one. Just imagine what it would be like to leave a people who were utterly destroyed and to join a whole new nation, an unknown tribe. Not only that, but it is known what you did for a living. How would she be accepted? Would she be an outsider? Would she ever truly be accepted?

This is where the story gets really good, better than any fantasy princess movie of our time. Rahab went from a pagan ripe for destruction to a participant with Israel. She not only lived with the people, but SHE MARRIED A PRINCE! She married Salmon, the son of Nashon, who was considered the prince of Judah. This was the tribe that David the King came from, and it is the tribal family line that Jesus Himself came from. In other words, God was not ashamed to have Jesus come from a lineage that included a former harlot, because the story of Rahab is the story of lavish grace, which Jesus showed and gave by His death on the cross.

B. Grace restores sinners to renewed relationship

This is a huge lesson for us to remember and embrace. God saves by grace and He saves completely. We often like to categorize the sins of people, and we feel comfortable to socialize and embrace those who sin like us, but we are often scared to embrace those who have the audacity to sin differently than us. When God's grace is given, restoration is complete. God restores sinners of all kind: prostitutes, addicts, arrogant, selfish, deviant, adulterers, idolaters, and even religious moralists. When God saves, He accepts us completely because Christ's death and resurrection paid for our sin completely. This means that people do not have to become LIKE US in our personality and growth, but simply have to become like us in placing our faith in Jesus.

Are we ready to embrace those who are rough, who haven't figured things out yet, who still may lie when the pressures on, and who have a shady past? I want to grow in this...do you?

What do we learn from God in Josh 2?

- **God saves sinners, of whom I am one**
- **God saves me by faith alone, not because I am better than anyone else**

- **God saves others in different ways than me, and I must view them through the lens of grace and humility** (Phil. 2:3) **Philippians 2:3** Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Remember, God saved Rahab with a scarlet cord, a symbol of God's atoning work on behalf of His own. Just like Israel put blood on their doorposts before they were released from Egypt, Rahab put a symbol to show she believed that God would save. We place our trust not in a **symbol**, but the actual scarlet blood of Jesus, who shed it on the cross to pay for our sins. **Because of the scarlet cord, we no longer have to wear scarlet letters.** We no longer are categorized by our sin, but are newly identified with our Savior. This is how we must view ourselves, but also each other.

This is the God that we are called to serve; this is the God that we choose to follow; this is the God that we entrust our life to.

Concluding Questions to Ponder:

- What is your greatest mission each day? Is it to worship God in all things, or does that get clouded in the vast immensity of daily life? How do make sure that we do not miss our Mission in light of carrying out daily missions?
- Is there anyone in your life that you've given up on? Have you stopped praying? Have you stopped hoping? Why is it so important to continue to pray for the most lost, those that seemingly cannot be saved?
- God saves by faith alone. How does that truth free us up to share the gospel? How does that truth give us freedom in missions?
- How do you treat different sins and sinners differently? What would it look like to view people through the lens of grace and not in weighted categories of sin?