

Prayer

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the gift of this day, which brings with it the fresh promise of all that is possible as Your Holy Spirit works in and through us. Even if we never know the full picture of what You can do through us, Lord God, may we accomplish with vigour everything You have given us to do. May we be fulfilled, and may Your eternal plans be completed. Thank You, Heavenly Father, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Prayer Ministry

In many churches and fellowships across the world, Christians organise their ministry so that prayer can be offered for people in need. Pray for those in your church who do this.

On-going prayers

- Pray for all those attempting to create peace in Gaza and Israel
- Pray for all who seek to establish justice for the poor
- Give thanks for the grace of God working in your life today!

Meditation

Sometimes, when we are tired of the life we have been given,
Our strength appears sapped from our inner spiritual reserves;
We lose hold of the things of God that normally, we hold dear.

The promises You given have held, but we question them,
We try to deal with things without handing them over to You,
Not realising that in faithfulness, You have to ever let us go.

Hold us firmly, do not let us fall, and show us why we fail.
Remove our guilt, calm our nerves when touched by fear;
Speak swiftly when we need the comfort of Your authority.

For real discipleship works, when in distress we trust our all to You.

Bible Study - Joshua 2:8-14

⁸ Before the spies went to sleep, Rahab came to them on the roof⁹ and said to them: 'I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that a fear of you has come over us and all who live in the land are overcome with fear because of you.' ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹ As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted and our courage failed us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. ¹² Now then, swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that in turn you will deal kindly with my family. Give me a pledge of good faith ¹³ that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver us from death.' ¹⁴ The men said to her, 'Our lives

for yours! If you do not tell what we are doing, then we will deal kindly and loyally with you when the LORD gives us the land.'

Review

Yesterday, we began to read the story of the spies who went into Jericho before the invasion of the Promised Land by Israel. They escaped capture because a prostitute, Rahab, protected them from those sent by the King of Jericho to capture them (2:1-7). The majority of this passage today contains the words of Rahab herself as she spoke to the Israelite spies hidden on her roof. We tend to remember the end, where Rahab pleaded for her life, asking that the Israelites would spare her and her family when the time came for the invasion of the city (2:12,13). Her request was met positively (2:14), and the promise was kept after the battle of Jericho (6:22-25).

It would be tempting to read and fail to consider anything further in what Rahab said, but there is more for us to consider. What Rahab said is remarkable in several ways, not least because it is a rare substantial speech by a woman, standing alongside the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), the speeches of Esther in the book of Esther, and the words of the woman in the love song of the 'Song of Solomon'. Rahab tells the story of the Exodus briefly, reflecting a godly perspective on those events, and confessing her belief in God and His right to give the land of Canaan to Israel (2:9). Rahab went to the roof to speak to the spies, and told them all this at a time of heightened tension in the city of Jericho when the king clearly believed that Israel posed a fearsome threat. Rahab not only took the opportunity to side with the Israelites in the belief that they were the more powerful, but was prepared to go further and express belief in God. We must not forget that the Israelites, the story of God's power at the time of the Exodus and deliverance from the Red Sea was holy. For them, it was the primary evidence of God's work in the world to save His people. In churches today we might recite a 'creed', which is like a 'statement of faith' binding Christians together. For Israel, Deuteronomy 6:20-25 confirms that the story of the Exodus through the Red Sea was essential to Israelite faith, the story was memorised, recited, and written down on ornaments and worn on the body (Deut 6:8,9).

Rahab recounted the basic Exodus story (2:10) and also confirmed what Moses records in scripture of God's reasons for delivering His people through the Red Sea. In Exodus 14:1-4, the Lord declares to Moses that his purpose was to defeat Pharaoh so that other nations would know that 'I am the Lord.' Now, in all Israel's journey through the wilderness they had sought peaceful passage, yet they were not given it (see the book of Numbers). Rahab clearly knew this, citing the battle between Israel and the Kings of Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:21f.), and Israel's victory over this opposition on the other side of the Jordan from Jericho. Rahab was therefore the first person of another nation to accept the evidence of the Exodus that God was supreme, saying, 'the Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below ...' (2:11). In addition, when Rahab sought an assurance that the spies would 'deal kindly' with her (2:12,13), her words meant more than we imagine. We cannot see in English that Rahab used the famous word 'cheseth' (meaning 'faithful love' or 'kindliness'), which was closely linked with the covenant promises of God in the book of Genesis. So Rahab had heard the evidence of God, believed it, acted on her belief and asked to be part of the 'covenant' community of God's people!

It is therefore possible to see in this simple story the basic elements of conversion to faith in God, even in Old Testament times. Rahab's expression of faith as explained in this way is not far from the beginnings of Christian conversion, except Jesus is not spoken of because the story is part of the Old Testament. Yet even as a partial explanation of someone's journey of faith, it has much to teach us. Sometimes people respond to God in very similar ways today, and they come to church with a faith similar to that of Rahab. They may be

short of a great deal of understanding of the deeper things of Christian faith, but with Rahab, they should be welcomed into the community of God's people.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group whether you believe that the story of Rahab here has sufficient interest or theology for a sermon.
2. What needs to be added to Rahab's 'faith' for a fuller Christian understanding of God?
3. Why was this part of the story of Rahab included in scripture?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is possible to argue that the points I have made in this study are not strong ones, but from an Old Testament perspective, they are. It was important for the story of God's people in the Old Testament for there to be evidence of people coming to God and joining the Israelites for reason of faith and not just earthly heritage, because the promise of God to Abraham was that through Israel, all nations would be blessed. People like Rahab and any others in the Old Testament make this promise believable, and speak of God concern for the 'gentiles', even before the time of the early church.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Have you known people who have 'turned up' at church with the hope of finding something or someone who will answer their spiritual needs, or with some basic faith which need to be explored? Reflect on what happens to such people in your church.*
- *Pray for all who have a belief in God today, and yet who are not willing to act on that belief, for whatever reason. This gives you wide scope because large numbers of people fall into this category! This, however, is an issue that needs to be dealt with more actively by the church today.*

Final Prayer

You grant power to us to do Your will, O Lord, and we praise You for this. Lead us on to be able and willing to do more for you as our lives unfold, and so be ever more fruitful in Your Kingdom. We pray this in confidence, O Lord, because of Your gracious love. AMEN