

A PROSTITUTE BECOMES A PRINCESS – JOSHUA 2:8-21

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ SEPTEMBER 7, 2014

⁸ Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given this land to you 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. ¹⁰ 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 Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. ¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. ¹² Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.” ¹⁴ “Our lives for your lives!” the men assured her. “If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land.” ¹⁵ So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. ¹⁶ Now she had said to them, “Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way.” ¹⁷ The men said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸ unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. ¹⁹ If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. ²⁰ But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.” ²¹ “Agreed,” she replied. “Let it be as you say.” So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I am sure, many of you have heard of the story of *The Prince and the Pauper*. It was written and published by Mark Twain in 1881 and has spawned a number of versions over the last century. The main story line revolves around the uncanny resemblance of two young boys, one of which (you can guess) is a prince, the other a pauper. Each envies the life of the other – the pauper envies the life of the prince with no worries, while the prince longs for a life without the restrictions of someone telling him what to do. So they switch places. For the pauper, it’s a story of rags-to-riches.

The rags-to-riches theme is so popular that many spinoffs have been made using it – from the orphans Oliver and Annie, to movies *Pretty Woman* and the Disney movie *Tangled*. Maybe it’s because we all dream of a better life, we all dream of the greener grass on the other side. We enjoy hearing when someone actually achieves it, even if it is only in a fairy tale. How much more meaningful it is when it happens in real life. And that’s exactly what happened to one woman in the ancient city of Jericho, a woman by the name of Rahab.

But this story of Rahab is so much more than her rise to riches. It also can be a revelation to us, of our own rags-to-riches story. Not so much a physical rags-to-riches story, but a spiritual one. It's the real life story of how A PROSTITUTE BECAME A PRINCESS.

1. With a healthy dose of fear and
2. An eye on a promise.

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The city of Jericho was on edge. Set just to the north of the Dead Sea and eight miles west of the Jordan River. It was late spring, and the countryside was in full bloom. There was no wonder why this part of the world was called the bread basket. But despite the beauty of the landscape and the cacophony of the variety of wildlife, dark clouds were on the horizon. Those were the clouds that came from the camp of Israelites, encamped on the far side of the Jordan River. Word had spread about the mighty deeds done by the Israelites' God. He defeated the army of the Egyptians by parting and un-parting of the Red Sea. He had already defeated two other kings and their deities east of the Jordan. And now rumors spread through the land like wildfire that they would be next to fall.

With the guards being on high alert, any stranger could arouse curiosity. Even when two strangers approached and entered a house of ill-repute, the shady "cash-only" motels of their day, it required some checking out. But Rahab, the prostitute told that the two men had left, just before the city gates closed for the day. She had nothing to hide they thought, she had nothing to gain from harboring these fugitives, for everyone feared the same thing – the wrath of the Israelite God smiting them down.

This was the fear that Rahab spoke about to the Israelite spies hidden on her roof. **"I know that the LORD has given this land to you 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."** All of the good and gracious things God had done for the Israelites had reached the ears of the citizens of Jericho. It is a fear of a child who is waiting for dad to come home and hear about what he has done. It is the fear of an employee who knows they are going to be fired by their boss. It's the fear of spouse who is caught in a bold-faced lie.

This is a fear we have when there's nothing more we can do, the ball is in another's court, we cannot stop whatever is coming. It is the natural fear we have when confronted with God and his holy law. It is a terrifying fear, our natural hearts should melt in fear at the awesomeness of our God. But that is not the fear that Rahab the prostitute had when she approached the Israelite spies. Yes, she had heard all the Israelite God had done, but she was not melting in fear like all those around her. She had a different fear, a respect for the power of God, and lay herself at God's mercy, just like she did for the Israelite spies. THE PROSTITUTE WHO BECAME A PRINCESS had a healthy dose of fear.

Rahab of all people would have recognized her life of ill-repute was not the way life ought to be lived. But this was more than Rahab just seizing upon an opportunity to better her situation, to become a band-wagon jumper. It was God-given faith. We read in Hebrews 11:31, **"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."** The key word there is "faith." Hebrews 11 is full of heroes of faith – Abel, Noah, Abraham, Rahab. They are not listed in here because they did good deeds, they are listed here because they did good deeds, in faith. A miracle worked by God as Romans 10 testifies, **"Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is**

heard through the word of God.” Rahab received this faith from God in the same way as Abel, Noah and Abraham, it was the gift of God.

Faith and a healthy dose of fear go hand in hand. Believers, those who have faith, have a respect for God, a respect not only of his almighty, just power, but also his almighty love. It is a faith that is given to people regardless of nationality, background or color. It is a faith that is given to people of all nationalities, backgrounds and colors. It is invisible faith that is this membership card to his Church.

While this comes as no surprise to us as Christians, this did come as a surprise to many of the Israelites. For years, even at this time, they had thought of themselves as God’s chosen people, God’s only chosen people. But it was this sense of pride that negated the healthy dose of fear they were to have as believers. Because pride in who you are replaces faith in what God has done for you. There’s a reason why there’s a phrase, “Pride comes before the fall.” That’s why humility is the shyest of virtues, as soon as you think you have it, it’s gone. As Christians, we must be wary of becoming prideful too.

It can be easy for us as Christians, as Lutherans, as WELSers to take a certain pride in who we are, how doctrinally sound we are, how faithful we are to God’s Word. The problem with this pride is it can negate the healthy dose of fear that a believer ought to have. Because everything then becomes about me and how good I have lived, how close to God’s Word I have lived. But that’s not our focus as Christians. Our focus as Christians, that healthy dose of fear, is recognizing who we are – sinners, and laying ourselves at the mercy of a holy God. A holy God who calls us to repentance, a turning away from those sins, that we might lay those sins at the feet of Jesus our Savior. We confess all our sins, even the sins of pride. Because we are no better than the prostitute Rahab.

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So it becomes clear that this PROSTITUTE BECAME A PRINCESS not by just having a healthy dose of fear, but also by having her eye fixed on a promise. For Rahab, she saw these Israelite spies not just as her way out of the physical destruction of her people, but also as her way out from the spiritual destruction that her life apart from the one true God, the LORD would lead. And so she called upon the LORD and asked the Israelite spies to swear by the LORD to let her live when the Israelites took the city. She put her trust in the LORD, she put her trust in the promise she made with the two spies. She had her eyes fixed on this promise.

For the Israelites to recognize the house they were not to destroy, the spies told her to hang the crimson rope from her window, and that anyone who wanted to avoid the destruction would remain inside the house. The crimson rope would remind her of the oath, and it would display her trust in the promise. Her hope lay in the hands of the Israelite men she was letting down the city wall through her window.



Rahab’s eyes fixed on a promise is similar to the eyes that Christians have fixed on a promise, in fact they are one and the same promise. Rahab looked forward with faith to the promise of a Messiah, just like we look back in faith to that promise fulfilled in Jesus. How much of this promise she understood, or where she learned of this promise we are unsure. But one thing we are sure about was

God created faith in her heart as we learned from Hebrews 11. And this faith made her righteous. Listen to James' words, **"In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?"** This is how the PROSTITUTE BECAME A PRINCESS.

But this was not all God would do for Rahab. In fact, we are told that Rahab married an Israelite, and well, listen to the rest from Matthew, **"Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David."** That is one and the same as king David. You see, Rahab was the great-grandmother of King David. And one of David's ancestors would be the promised Messiah, Jesus. God not only showed that gentiles would be a part of his church, but he used a woman like Rahab in the line of Jesus. Jesus had the blood of Rahab running through his veins. All because of simple, God-given faith to Rahab, who kept her eye fixed on a promise.

Now, our blood may or may not eventually run through the veins of a famous person, but we have the blood of Jesus running through our veins. That is the sure sign that we need, that is a constant reminder of the oath God swore to us to save us, much like the crimson rope in Rahab's window was. You can bet, whenever Rahab looked to that window and saw that crimson rope, she was reminded of that promise she made. You can bet she fixed her eyes on that promise as all the other walls of Jericho fell down around her, and yet hers against all odds did not.

That is what we are to do as Christians – have our fixed on that promise of the God who came to save us, who will come to take us from this world. And when all other walls around us come toppling down, we have the sure promise that ours will not. For we were once worthless lumps of clay. But God has made us more than that. He has made us princes and princesses in his kingdom. He has gathered us into his family, with a healthy dose of fear, and an eye fixed on his promise. Amen.