



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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BUT GOD...SHE'S A PROSTITUTE

Joshua: Obtaining Victory in the Christian Life
Joshua 1:10-2:24

[PRAYER] We thank you for your word and the power that it has. Lord, this frankly has been a real upsetting week with a lot of things that can disrupt our hearts, so we entrust ourselves to you now. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're memorizing a Bible verse. Let's say this Bible verse together. Joshua 1:8: *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.* Joshua 1:8. It's one of the verses we're going to memorize out of the book of Joshua that I think will help you in a number of ways.

Last week we talked about Joshua 1:1-9, a conversation that God had with Joshua to tell him what he needed to do. "Here's what we're going to do, Joshua, and I want to lead you forward." Today we're going to see his response and how we move forward starting in verse 10.

Joshua 1:10. *So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.'"* "Get ready," he says. What great words for us when we need to get ready for all kinds of things that we're doing. They're preparing themselves to go into the Promised Land.

In our personal lives we're going to imagine and we're going to compare the going in and crossing the Jordan to our own spiritual lives. That is, going into the Christian life and what that looks like and fighting the battles in the Christian life. That's where we're headed as we continue on in this particular passage.

But he's saying, "Get ready." I think we need to get ourselves ready for the spiritual challenges we're going to face. We're all going to face some. Whether they be storms that are on the outside or storms that are on the inside, we need to prepare for those battles and we need to be ready to face them.

It's the getting ready that's really important because the getting ready is what's going to help us know how to handle the unexpected things that are going to come into our lives. Whether it's the interruptions of life - I'm not talking about interruption just here in our service, I'm talking about the interruptions that take place which cause us to get angry. Or the misunderstandings that we might have or the unexpected take place. When those things happen in our lives then we can

sometimes have reactions on the inside or on the outside that are not pleasing to the Lord. So we want to be ready, just as Joshua's saying, "Get ready. We're going into the Promised Land. Let's go in and let's take this."

Now look at Joshua 1:12. *But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: 'The Lord your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.'* The word 'rest' is the word I'm going to focus on in a minute.

Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the Lord gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

There was an agreement made between the tribes, Reuben and Gad and a half-tribe of Manasseh, two and a half tribes, that when they go into the Promised Land they could stay on the east side and live there and all their families could live there. But they were required to go over the Jordan River and fight the battle with them to take the land. So they had this agreement and Joshua's reminding them of the agreement.

It's interesting that he uses this term 'rest' to refer to the land in verse 13 and also in verse 15. It's interesting because it wasn't really restful what they were about to do. If you read the rest of the chapters of Joshua, it's certainly not restful. They had lots of work they had to do. They had battles to fight. They had challenges they needed to face. But inside, they had this rest and that's what the important thing is that Joshua is describing here. When you go into the Promised Land there will be some rest that you will have. There's this internal rest that we can enjoy because you're following the Lord and He's giving you the land. For us as Christians, we're in this place that God is allowing us to be.

There are three things that I want to say about this rest, this "ahhhh" experience that we have. It's the same experience that we have when the lights come on after the electricity's been off for a while. Finally, there's a sense of rest. Not that there's not a lot of work to do, we still have to do the work, but there's something that happens inside. There's this rest that we experience inside. He's talking about a spiritual rest.

First thing that I want to say about this rest is this is the passage that's going to allow me, all the rest of our time through the book of Joshua, to compare the entry into the Promised Land to the Christian life. I want you to see that interpretation that I'm going to do and the application that's being made. I want you to see how it comes right out of this passage as we look at another passage for a moment.

Turn with me to Hebrews 4 because this story that we're being told about in Joshua is quoted or used in Hebrews 4. In Hebrews 4 it's talking a quite a bit about rest and I want you to see what that looks like in practical terms. He's going to talk about rest in Hebrews 4 and he's going to

compare the Joshua rest and the Sabbath rest. David's talking about this whole thing together, comparing it to the Christian life. Let me read this passage to you and help you understand it. He's describing a rest that we can have in our own hearts because of the salvation we have through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. That rest is available to you and to me. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. So they heard the message of salvation, but they didn't combine it with faith, so they weren't able to experience the rest that God had for them.

I want you to know today that you're hearing a message about the gospel of Jesus Christ. You're hearing a message about salvation. When you hear that message, it must be accompanied by a faith that you personally put into that in order for you to accept that rest that God wants to provide for you.

Verse 3. *Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.*

That's what we've already learned about the Israelites who came to the edge of the Jordan River. They couldn't go in and experience the rest because they didn't believe. They were disobedient to God.

Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." It's very important in our own lives that we don't harden our hearts if we want to experience the rest that God has designed for us. We'll talk about what that rest is in a moment, but I just want you to see this passage because he's talking about the rest going into the Promised Land and comparing it to the Christian life.

Notice the next verse because he refers back to the story of Joshua. *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

So this rest that God is providing for us through the Christian life is a beautiful thing. I want you to see that's my first point about rest. In the coming weeks we're going to compare the whole experience of entering in the rest of Joshua to the Christian life coming out of this passage in Hebrews that allows us to do just that.

The second thing that I want to say about this rest is it's a spiritual satisfaction that we have in our own hearts. We should be at a place that we can rest in the midst of difficult situations, in the midst of anger or guilt or bitterness or disappointment or restlessness or frustration. We ought to be able to have that rest inside of us. There's this peace that God provides to us that's a beautiful thing. That's one of the benefits of being a Christian: being at rest inside of our hearts and knowing how to enter into that rest on a regular basis.

The third thing I want to say about this rest is God calls us to it. This is like our calling. Years ago when I was working on developing stress-reduction strategies in my own life, a doctor friend of mine, who was not a believer at the time, counseled me through some process of stress-reduction. He tied it together and said, "You have a calling. Why don't you tie this into your calling somehow?" This wave of the Holy Spirit just fell on me at that point. I am a Christian and I have a calling and that calling, number one, is to be at peace with God. And that peace that passeth all understanding can guard my heart and my mind in Christ Jesus. That's what I need to do. So it became not just a physical stress-reduction strategy that I was doing, but a spiritual experience that God wants to do deep inside of my heart.

I would suggest that's one of the most important things that we can ever do in our lives is to be at peace with God. That comes through this Christian experience that we have with God and allows us to be at peace with Him.

I'm learning how to do that more and more in my life. I'm learning how to enjoy life more and more. I am now happier than I've ever been in my life and I'm sure it's because of not so much things on the outside, but things God is doing where I'm able to be serving Him and enjoying who He is more. I feel like I'm happier now than I've ever been. I think that's this rest that God wants us to have. I need to keep working on that and I would encourage you to embrace that rest in the midst of all the struggles and challenges that you face or disappointments.

God is calling us to that rest and He says in Matthew 11:28, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" It's this privilege that we have to enjoy and that's what Joshua is saying to the people. "We're going into the Promised Land. We're going to obtain this rest that God wants us to have."

Let's read on in our passage in Joshua 1.

So Joshua's just told them to get ready. "Let's go. We're going in to take over the land." *Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"*

These people were saying to Joshua, "Go ahead and lead." I appreciate those encouraging words that come to me as a leader that say, "Yes, I want to serve the Lord. I want to do what God is doing here," and just give that affirmation of leadership. I would encourage you to do that with Erik in these next few days as we go in and continue to lead in our town and try to serve the Lord here and share Jesus with people. Continue to support him.

That's what's happening. These people are saying, "Yes, Joshua. We're going to follow you. Let's lead. Let's go forward." I think we all need those examples in models. I'm looking for people who want to say, "Yes, I want to serve the Lord one hundred percent." I'm looking for families who are saying, "Yes, in our family we want to serve the Lord." I'm looking for young people who say, "Yes, I want Jesus to use me." I think that's what we're trying to move forward and do as we try to lead this church and we try to guide this place to be the place where God can touch people in very special ways.

So then let's go on. *Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."*

This passage of scripture in Joshua 2 is very important. It's very important because it's the passage of scripture that shows us, tells us a story about how a family, who are not Jewish, becomes embraced into the Israelite community. They're different. They're different on a number of levels. They're not Jewish, but also she's a prostitute. In the past she didn't have the same values that they did within the Jewish community and now she's going to be brought into the faith. It's such a great evangelism passage with applications for us. I'm really grateful.

Imagine these spies that Joshua sent. They are out there gathering military information. That's their goal. We're going to see that the Jordan River's at flood stage shortly in the next chapters and so these men must have had to swim across the Jordan River. They get to the other side and they probably walk right into town into Jericho.

They come across this woman and they start talking to her. As they start talking to her, they find out several things about her. They're going to find out that she's a prostitute and she's going to say to them, "Hey. You need to get off the street. You need to come over here. You need to get out of here because you're in a dangerous place."

She's going to say two things to them. One is, "Come on. You need to be safe. Let's get you out of here." But the other thing she's going to say is, "We've heard about you guys and I believe in what you're doing. I want to be a part of that." Those two things become very significant.

I think these guys who are going out there to gather the military information discovered something about their work. Their work was more than just discovering military information; at the moment they are missionaries. I wonder if they even realized that they were going to be missionaries. They were not in the business of trying to get other people to join the Jewish faith at that time. They were going in to conquer the land. But they were sensitive enough to see God working in that particular place.

I think it's a good application for us because we're going out there helping people with trees that are down on their house, trees that are on their cars, damage that's happened on their properties,

providing them with food and shelter, all kinds of things we're trying to help people with. But our primary job is we're missionaries. We're sharing a message with them. Some will respond. If they're not responding, that's okay. We'll love them! We'll just care for them. But some will respond and say, "Yes, I want to know more about who you guys are, what you're doing here."

But it's not just in a storm situation, although hearts are open more in a storm situation than normally so it's a great opportunity of ours to share the gospel with people, with your neighbors, and to talk to them. Maybe you had significant conversations with your neighbors you haven't had in weeks or months or years because of the storm. It's a tremendous opportunity to share. But even when you go to work or when you go to school or wherever you go, the primary job we have is to be missionaries, to invite people in to a new life. That's what's going to happen in this woman, Rahab, so that they could understand.

Why would somebody come into a cafeteria in a school, listen to some worship songs, listen to someone teach for thirty-five minutes, sing some more songs, and go away? See, it's not about something we're doing here. It's about something God is doing in our hearts. When He does those things in our hearts we want to be with other people so that we can grow spiritually and God does this deeper work inside of our lives. We're growing together to be the people that God wants us to be. We're not attending a service; we're sharing with each other and growing in Christ. We know we need that nurture in order to be the people that God wants us to be.

Let's go on to verse 4. The king says, "Bring out these guys." *But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them."* (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)

This woman lied. That's what she did. Rahab lied. She took the men up on the roof, she hid them under the grain that was drying up on the roof and then she told the servants from the king, "They went out the gate. They're gone. They said goodbye to me. Go check on the road to see if you can find them."

We have to ask the obvious question. Was that okay for her to lie? She's actually doing something good. She's trying to protect these people. I would suggest that it's never right to do something wrong in order to do something right. That's what I would suggest. I think she's wrong in lying. But I think she's a really new, green kind of a person when it comes to faith in God. I don't think she fully understood the great things God could do. She'd heard about them, but she didn't realize that God has the ability to protect these spies. God has the ability to do all kinds of things to protect the things that are going on here. So I think she made a mistake in doing this. I think she had a lot to learn.

Proverbs 6:16-19 says, *There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.* God hates lying.

But I think what she thought in her mind was, "Well, I'm trying to do something good and I can't think of any other good way to do it, so I'm going to lie to accomplish this objective." I think it's a mistake. It lacks the faith necessary. I think Abraham did the same thing when he went down to Egypt and lied, saying that his wife was his sister, thinking, "I'm going to save myself; I'm going to lie in order to do it."

I think it's a mistake that she's making, but she's a young believer, if she's even a believer yet. She's going to be soon. She's just learning about God's power. It doesn't excuse the lie, but it helps us understand what is going on in the passage.

She was commended in the scriptures; her name is mentioned in Hebrews 11. It says, *By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.* Not because she lied, but because she welcomed the spies. That's what gave her the freedom to be able to move forward.

Let's go back to Joshua 2 and continue reading the passage.

So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof 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. 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. 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.

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 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." "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."

This woman's a prostitute. What credentials does she have to come and be part of the Israelite community? None. It's the grace of God that allows any of us to be part of the spiritual life and to enjoy what God wants to do.

God rescued this one woman from Jericho. We have to imagine that Joshua's going to come in and he's going to take over this whole city. The walls are going to fall down. We're going to learn all about that in the coming weeks. But before he does, he's going to rescue one woman out of there because that woman has a heart that follows after God. It's such a beautiful story of God's protection for a person who loves the Lord.

It's amazing to hear stories of missionaries who are going out and they find that the ground has already been laid for the message of the gospel to come. People are prepared for that message. But you don't have to be missionaries to do that, right? You start sharing Jesus Christ with people locally and you find that God has already been doing a work in their lives. You just get to

be this one person who comes in and gets to share the message with them. That's such a beautiful thing. God protects His people. God protects those people who are responsive to Him.

This message was brought home to me about twenty-five year ago and it's so vivid in my mind I can even picture it today. My brother, Mark, who's a pastor, and I, twenty-five years ago, were hiking in Hawaii where we lived at the time. We were hiking into the jungle area. We enjoyed going out into the bush, so to speak, and hike. We came across this abandoned - I don't want to call it a house - a shack or something, all broken down with all kinds of stuff around it. As we started looking around, it was kind of fun for us young guys to explore all of this.

So we're looking at it all and enjoying ourselves and we came to a jar that had a bird in it and it was against a rock. The bird's flying around in the jar, he's moving around, but he can't get out of the jar. Here we are in the jungle. There's nobody around. Who knows when the last person was there. And how in the world did the bird get in there? I have no idea.

Well, my brother kicked the jar and the bird flew away. Right away, because I know the scriptures and I had memorized some of these verses, my mind came to this verse, Matthew 6:26: *Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*

That moment was a worship moment for me where I realized that God cares about me, He loves me. I'm valuable to Him and He protects me.

I look at this story at God taking Rahab and bringing her out of that wicked lifestyle in the past, those people who weren't serving the Lord, and he brings that woman into the Israelite community to be one of His chosen people.

Let's go on in the story. Verse 15. *So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. 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."*

The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us 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. 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. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

So this scarlet cord is out the window, a faith in the woman's heart, and God is doing something here that's powerful. There were three things she needed to do. Number one: don't tell other people. Number two: put the cord out in the outside. And number three: bring all the family into your house, your apartment, right outside of the wall there. When you're there and you're protected and you're doing all those things, then God will rescue you.

So this verse kind of moves us forward in the story so that we can see in Joshua 6 what actually happened when Joshua came in, conquered the city. *But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.*

She lives among the Israelites to this day? That's an amazing story that God would allow her to be a part of that community. Let's just finish the chapter and I'll make a few more comments here.

Verse 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.*

When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. They said to Joshua, “The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.”

So God is using this whole story and the whole preparation to move them into the land, but it's a story of protection of one woman. You have to wonder what happened to her. She came into the community there. You think she ever married anybody? Well, she did. She married a man from the tribe of Judah whose name was Salmon.

You know how we know that? We're told in Matthew 1:5 because this is the beautiful thing about this story: God takes this woman and uses her in the line of the Messiah.

Can you imagine? We read in Matthew 1 the lineage of Jesus Christ going all the way back to the beginning. All the way through we have this lineage going from this son to this son and then we come to Rahab the prostitute who married Salmon. The line of Jesus Christ came through this woman. Wow. That just blows my mind.

Why not keep it pure? God, why not just keep it pure so that everything just goes straight down and it's obviously pure all the way through? Why not just keep it that way? And God says, “No, no, no. I don't do it that way. I demonstrate my mercy and my grace and I embrace people in.” It's not about the purity of people; it's about the grace of God that is so powerful. Every one of us is brought into the beautiful message of God's grace only by the mercy of God and the grace of God.

The story of Rahab is an amazing story. Who knows what the person who lives next to you or the people you're concerned about or that you brush up against in life might not be just ready to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It might be that person that might have terrible problems. This woman used to be a prostitute, but somehow God, with His grace in her life, changed her around so that she was ready to follow the Lord, be a God-fearer.

I serve an amazing God and I am so grateful because that means even a person like me can be used by God. Let's pray together.