

Jesus our Joshua (6)

The unexpected Helper. Joshua 2:12-24.

“She tied the scarlet cord in the window” v-21.

“Now there was a man named Nicodemus” John 3:11.

Jericho was the nearest city to the Israelite camp, but it was on the other side of the Jordan river. Joshua faced a huge problem. 1. The Jordan was in flood. 2. Jericho was full of hostile Canaanites who were known for their wickedness and idolatry. While the Western world and the church, unlike Israel is not anticipating military warfare there is never-the-less an unseen war being waged against those who advocate a Christian view of life. While it is more cultural/ideological in nature, there is an intent to replace traditional Christian values, and also to modify the Church itself. Sometimes in life we face what appears to be difficult, even impossible situations. The first key is to be accurately informed and so Joshua arranged under-cover spies to enter Canaan to determine the strength of Jericho.

Rahab, a temple-cult priestess and prostitute lived within the city where there were few moral values. Unlike Joshua’s spies Rahab was radically different. She was a pagan woman whose profession was considered honourable. History records that Israel sometimes received help from outside people of other nations. In this case it appears God had chosen to use a most unlikely person for his purposes. Rahab must have been a thinking person. She had heard of the victories and miracles of the Israelites and had become convinced that Israel’s God was the true God. In a hostile environment Rahab had placed her faith in God’s promises and this led to a surprising new direction and loyalty for Rahab and her family (v 9-11) God often reaches beyond the limits of our expectations and even unlikely people can declare their loyalty to God. Can you think of ‘outsiders’ being used in New Testament times? What may this mean for us?

Joshua’s spies had raised suspicion among the local people of Jericho but at the risk of being charged with treason Rahab provided cover and saved Joshua’s spies from possible death. The Israelite advance party learned that all the people of the city were in panic, in fact they were terrified of the Israelites. (Josh 2: 4 and (9:11) It was a walled city, a great fortress with houses built into the walls and Joshua’s spies may have used Rahab’s house as their point of entry. Frightened Jericho would remain behind its tightly closed gates, doomed by its rebellious faith in false gods. Rahab’s dangerous new loyalty however would bring life to her and her family. Rahab and the spies made a desperate pact (v14). The advice of Mathew Henry remains relevant today.

“Let not God’s Israel be afraid of the most powerful enemies; for their God can, when he pleases, make their most powerful enemies afraid of them.” ---

This became the arrangement. (1). The spies would make their escape by Rahab tying a scarlet cord that would enable her to let the spies down through her window to make their escape (v 18) (2). The same cord would be the mark, the guarantee to preserve Rahab’s safety from the invaders.

This was much more than a matter of two parties helping each other out.

God still calls us today to be bold, to venture with Him into new territory and to sometimes expect the unexpected from the most unlikely people and circumstances. (This was not unlike Paul's escape from Damascus 2 Cor 11:33.) In a similar way Nicodemus was a leader of the Jews who spoke up for Jesus and who boldly provided spices for Jesus' embalment.

God sometimes provides a way of escape against impossible odds. The scarlet cord was like the blood sprinkled on the door posts of the Israelites in Egypt and that saved the first-born child. It is also like the protection of the blood of Christ applied to the conscience of every Christian believer. It is the provision of God's free grace alone and Jesus dying our death that sets us free from guilt, accusation and our serious predicament; --the enemy of sin and death. Jesus really is our Joshua today. Like being under Joshua and using the scarlet cord, Jesus becomes our deliverer, our way of escape through the lines of the enemy.

Reflection:

(1) Christians can sometimes be stuck in a rut, routine or habit. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews. (John 3 v1) but when Jesus' body was removed from the cross, he came "*bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes*." (John 19:39). God often surprises us by using the unexpected. What does this mean for us?

((2) Poised and ready to enter the Promised Land, the distinction between wearing male and female clothing was to be preserved. (Deut. 22:5) It was a Canaanite practice for some men to dress and act as women—transvestitism (see also 1 Cor 6:9) This was not so much a matter of whether women should wear men's pants as much as God was calling the Israelites to be a distinct, a holy nation and not to adopt the practices of the Canaanites. Discuss distinctions between male and female role and kind.

(3) Discuss the statement, "J.B. Phillips book, '*Your God is too Small*' encourages Christians to think of God beyond labels or static constraints."

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