

Date of sermon: 2/20/2022  
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke  
Bible passage or verse: Joshua 2:1-24  
Title of Sermon: Flawed People Can Make Beautiful Lives  
Series: Courageous Living in a Dangerous World

**2** Then Joshua's 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. **2** The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." **3** 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." **4** 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. **5** At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." **6** (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) **7** 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. **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 you this land 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 in fear 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** She 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** Now the men had 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 any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. **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. **22** 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. **23** 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. **24** 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."

Some days people struggle with "Did God really write the Bible?" and, you know, and "Did people put it together?" and -- whenever somebody makes that statement like that -- "I just think the Bible is the fabrication of a bunch of people who wrote it," I take them to many places, but one of them is Joshua two. Because if you were writing the Bible, if you were tasked with writing the Bible, you'd never put this chapter in. You wouldn't -- you wouldn't run the risk. You wouldn't say,

"Wow, and God's gonna deliver His people from Egypt and take them into the promised land, and He's gonna use a prostitute to do it." No, you wouldn't write it that way. You would skip chapter two and you'd go from chapter one -- Joshua, who was commanded by God to have great courage, and then you'd skip right over to chapter three where they're crossing into the Jordan. You wouldn't run the risk of putting this lady in. Why? Because she has a reputation, and everyone hated her. Well, God decided -- "Let me put her in the story," but then He goes and does the absurd. If you go to Matthew chapter one, where they're giving the lineage of Jesus, and that means that they're authenticating that He's the Messiah, that He's the Savior, and that they should trust him -- and they give this long list, and there's kings and there's glorious people. And then the editor has a bad day and he puts Rahab. The prostitute. And by the way, every time her name is used in the Bible, it's always that way. Rahab, the prostitute.

And then when the writer of Hebrews -- we don't know fully who that is -- but it's different than Joshua, and it's different than Matthew -- and so, again, somebody under the inspiration of God is writing this story of all the heroes. The people that the Nation of Israel wanted their kids to be like. "I want you to be just like Moses, who led the people out of Egypt. I want you to be just like Abraham, who had phenomenal faith." And then, of all things, chapter 11, verse 31, in this list of these stellar people -- "By faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." And I think, once again, if humans were going to write this text -- the Bible -- we wouldn't put chapter two in there. We wouldn't have run the risk. There's no way. We wouldn't let a shady lady become the hallmark story of God's redemption. We would have never said it.

And by the way, when you look at Hebrews chapter 11, verse 31, you have to ask yourself a question -- at least I do. God, why do you describe her that way? You know, when I'm redeemed, I don't think God -- you know, when I step into Heaven -- I don't think God's going to say, "Welcome home, Mark, you who..." -- and list off my most notable sins. I don't know about you, but if He does that to you, I want to be there. Cheer you on. I'll speak for you -- on your behalf! I don't think God's going to do that. So, I wonder -- God, why? Why, every time in the Bible, in Matthew, in Joshua, in Hebrews, do you write, "by faith the prostitute Rahab"? Wouldn't it have been more redemptive and more encouraging when God gets ahold of your life, He give you a completely new identity. Wouldn't it be better if God would write "by faith, Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed by those who were disobedient"? Wouldn't that just be nicer? I think it would be.

And so, I asked God, "God, why did you do that? Do you do that to all of us?" Peter, the over-promiser and under-performer, who, at a drop of a hat, can deny he even knows Jesus. Paul, the murderer, who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament. Does God do that? Because He sure does with Rahab. Does God just have a thing for prostitutes that He doesn't like them? Or maybe, what God wants us to be reminded of by this lady -- and the reason maybe He put this in the text -- is not to tell us what God did, but to tell us what God does. Every day. And that is, He

delights in using people that society more often than not rejects. He delights in it. He loves it. He thrives on it, in fact. It's almost as if God tries to do that. Find a person that society wants to shove to the side that doesn't have a good reputation, that ladies hate her and guys shun her, and God almost looks at it and says, "Yup, that's a person I want to use."

I mean, think about it for a moment. Let's just go through a few of the individuals that God has chosen. Let's start with Abraham. Let's imagine that Abraham's coming to our church and we're going to interview him to be a pastor. After all, he was a person of great faith, right? He was the one to whom God gave the promise to the Nation of Israel. And so, Abraham comes in. "Abraham, are you a faithful husband?" "Yeah, I'm pretty faithful." "Are you a man of your word?" "Ah, most of the time." "What do you mean by that?" "Well, periodically I lie. Usually when talking about my wife. Yeah, I'm kinda truthful. I'm gutless, to be quite honest with you. I started the whole Middle East issue, so if you want to see a person who periodically lies about his wife and launched the Middle East crisis," Abraham says, "I'm your guy -- hire me." He wouldn't get past interview one. Not in our church.

Let's try Moses. Moses comes in for an interview. "Moses," you know, "how's your patience with people?" "Ah, not too bad. Unless they tick me off." "What happens when you get ticked off?" "I kill 'em." "How do you think you would be at leading deacons?" "I'd probably kill 'em." "All right, Moses. Not sure we're gonna give you a second interview." David. "David, you're a warrior." "Yes, I am." "And, in fact, you have an incredible team. Your team loves you." "Yup, they do. These guys, I'm telling you what, they broke through a war zone one time just to get me a drink of water. They love me." "David, it seems like you love your guys, but you also love other women." "Yeah. To be honest with you, I can't be satisfied -- you know, if you love one, you love ten." That's David's theory. "David, you know we have deaconesses." "Oh yes, I've looked at them already." I don't think David gets a second interview in our church. "Peter -- we need a pastor." I'm not announcing anything, so don't get weird on this thing. "Peter" -- "Yeah?" "Do you follow through on things?" "Most of the time." "Have you ever been known to speak impulsively?" "Every day." "Have you ever acted before you thought?" "Always." "You ever stuck your foot in your mouth?" "Ha! On the hour." Hmm. "Peter, maybe we shouldn't let you be the spokesperson of our church." Be a good thing. "Saul -- you're also named Paul, right?" "Yeah, yeah." "Um -- it's important for us to have a pastor who's not prone to anger and rage. You ever have a problem with that?" And he goes, "Yeah. I used to." "What did you do with it?" "I'd kill people."

Just stop for a moment. The number one leader in the Nation of Israel of all time, Moses, was a hot-headed murderer who had moments of rage, even with God. Abraham, notorious liar. Great man of faith. He just kept putting his wife in really horrible situations. David, an adulterer. Peter, a liar. And Saul, a killer. Now, either God has a terrible sense of selecting the right people to lead His church, or He delights in using the people that society rejects.

I don't like this. Because, to be quite honest with you, I oftentimes have the values more of our culture than of God. And it's really easy to dismiss people who come to you and say, "Yeah, I want to work in your women's ministry." "Great! What's your qualifications?" "I ran a really, really successful brothel." Hmm. You see, that's why God put chapter two in the Bible. You and I wouldn't have done it. We wouldn't have the guts. We just simply wouldn't have. But Rahab, who is always described as "the prostitute" -- not because I think for a moment God wants to shame her, but because God wants to communicate to you it's not just what He did, it's what He does. And He takes people, and He helps them understand, as He does with Rahab, that your past is not your destiny when you trust Him.

Her life ends way different than this snapshot. It's true she lived on the edge of the city right on the wall. Remember Jericho, that wall that came down? That was her home. It got ransacked by God. She lived. But her identity didn't remain the prostitute. It became the legacy of Christ. It became an illustration of great faith. It became something that God does. Why? Because she changed her behavior? Not at all. Not for a while. She had faith. That's what changed her life. She had faith in the biggest God, in the one true God. Let me just list some of the things that she stated. "God has given you this land. I believe it." She's not a Jewish person -- she's a Canaanite woman, and she's a woman in a culture in which she didn't have anything going for, and she tells the spies, "I believe God has given this land to you."

You know who she reminds me of? She reminds me of a little guy who's standing there with a slingshot and some rocks in his hand, who's standing before a nine-foot behemoth, and David looks up to Goliath -- and you remember what he says? "You uncircumcised Philistine. Who do you think you are, to stand between the people of God and the promise of God?" You see, David wasn't thinking of how studly he was. He was thinking about how offensive it was that someone would say to the people of God, "I am going to stop the promise of God." She said the same thing. "God has given to you this land. Not only that -- we have heard of the power of your God, for the Lord your God, He is God in the heavens and on the earth." There were all kinds of gods that acted in the heavens, but this is a god, she said, that acted on the sea.

I kind of enjoy it, to be quite honest with you, when people who are anti-supernaturalists try and explain away the miracles of the Bible. And one of the things they'll do with the whole issue of the Red Sea -- you can look this up on Google or anything else -- and you can find stories about this. They write about it, and what they will suggest is -- it wasn't a sea that God parted, it was the Reed Sea. And what they want to suggest is that God led His people through the Reed Sea, which was maybe six to eight inches. Kind of a, if you would, a swamp land. Okay. Let's imagine for a moment that God leads His people through the Reed Sea. Not much of a miracle. You're right. Let's write that one off. But can you help me explain how the people of God got through the Reed Sea, this little six-to-eight-inch marshy land, and when the Egyptians came through, they all drowned. God

supernaturally stuck their head in six inches of water and held them there like a bully. That's pretty miraculous, God, I'm with you!

No, the reality is -- it was a miracle. And she believed it. She believed that God was God of the heavens and of the earth, and she believed that God parted the sea, and she believed that the Nation of Israel was led out, and she believed that she was living in the promised land. She believed that she was a part of the vision of God. An ordinary Canaanite woman who ran a brothel for her vocation. What God was enamored by was her faith. And when God sees a person, no matter what their stature is, of great faith, He delights in her, and He uses her.

There was a lady years ago that did a lot of speaking, and her name was Ann Kiemel. She -- if you ever heard her, you never forget her. She's a light, petite little lady, and when she spoke, at most, five people could hear her unless she had a microphone. She had such a dainty voice. She wrote a book -- it was titled, I'm Out to Change My World. Pretty audacious for a common little Oklahoma gal. One day she was traveling, and she was going to speak somewhere, and she pulled into a gas station, and a gentleman came out to serve her and said, "How can I help you?" "I need to fill up." And he goes, "Where you headed?" She goes, "I'm headed to Oklahoma City to speak." "Oh. What are you gonna speak about?" And she goes, "How Jesus changed my life." And he looked at her and goes, "I'm an agnostic."

She responded back, only as Ann Kiemel could -- "Oh, I have never met an agnostic! I am so happy to meet you." He kinda looks at her like, "What kind of a strange, weird woman are you?" And then she follows up, and she says, "Can I ask you a question? Do you ever have any needs? Ever have any problems, at all?" And he said, "Yeah." She goes, "What's your greatest struggle in your life?" And he goes, "I feel completely insignificant. All I do is pump gas. And if I were to die tomorrow, not anyone in this world would miss me." At that point, Ann, right on the edge of being late, decides -- I'm gonna go for it. She begins to talk with him, and she tells him, "My life was just like yours. I am not a compelling person. I was insignificant until I discovered that there was a God who sent His son Jesus to die for me because He loved me." And she looks this hardened man in the face and says, "And my God loves you. And apart from Christ, you and I," she said, "are terribly insignificant. But when the God who created the heavens and the earth loves you, He loves you into significance."

She wanted to stay and continue the conversation, and she said that to him, but she said, "I've got to go. I've got to go speak and tell people about how Jesus changed my life. And if you'll let Him, He'll change yours." She gets in her car. He comes over to the driver's door -- the window's down -- and he looks in and he goes, "You know what, lady? For the first time in my life, you've made me want to believe." God specializes in taking very ordinary people whose voice is weak but whose faith is as big as the world, because their faith is not in themselves, their faith is in God. And that's what Rahab said. "Oh, dear spies, our entire city is filled with

terror about you. The word of God, the word of what He has done has gotten out to us, and we are paralyzed." But she didn't tell about her fear. You know what she stated? "God has given you this land, for the Lord your God, He's the God of the heavens and the earth. We've heard about your power." Her past was not her destiny. Not when she trusted God. And because of that, God decided to use her. He always does. God has compelled himself to use people of faith. He has.

And by the way, when there's no faith, God limits himself. Remember when Jesus came in, He goes, "I cannot perform miracles here. I cannot do certain things here." Why? "Because there's no faith." Jesus didn't arbitrarily come into a city and say, "You know what? I don't need faith. I'm just gonna do whatever I wanna do." No, God has chosen to limit himself, tether himself, connect himself to people of faith. I don't know why God did it -- doesn't make a lot of sense to me, because sometimes I think, "Oh, God -- you need more than what I've got." The fact is, God uses the faith of the least of these, and He delights in using flawed people to make beautiful plans. That's why He put this story in there. It's not because this is what God did -- it's because it's what He does. And when He gets ahold of a person, and He changes their life, He changes everything about them -- their faith begins to start this new life as it did with Rahab. And her life changed -- it did.

There are two trajectories -- I certainly prefer one of them. Some historians suggest that Rahab married Joshua. Reality is, the Bible didn't say anything about Joshua getting married. I don't really prefer that pathway. I do prefer the pathway that she married a man by the name of Salmon, and together they had a young son by the name of Boaz. And if you've ever read the book of Ruth, you know the place that Boaz served. She started a new life. Her family was preserved. Her house was destroyed, but her life lived on. She made it into Matthew 1. She made it into Hebrews 11. And if story is correct, and you put it together with Matthew, she did get married and she did have a son, and Boaz was a man of unparalleled character. And stature. And importance in the story of God. She started a new life, not because she changed her behavior but because she expressed her faith, and when you express your faith in the transforming power of God, He changes you.

She also established a godly lineage. First chapter of Matthew. Rahab is in the list of all the great kings of Judah and of Israel, and then comes down there, and there's Rahab and there's Boaz and there's all of these different people whom Jesus -- through Matthew -- Jesus, being God -- through Matthew is writing out the lineage, making sure that you and I know that we have the Messiah, we have God's son, we have the Savior of the world. How do we know that? Let's trace it back to the promise of God. And right there in the list is a woman whose life has been transformed. That's what God does. He takes you, and it doesn't matter what your history is, doesn't matter how good or how bad, but when you place your faith in Christ, you begin to write a new lineage. It's a lineage of faith. It's a lineage of promise. And she confirmed a legacy of faith. Hebrews 11:31 -- "By faith the

prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

Why would God put chapter two in this story? He didn't need to. It's a parenthetical kind of story. I think He did it because He wants you to know -- this is not what God did, this is what God does. And He does it time and time again. And the implication for you and me is really significant. Number one -- some of you have been using your past as a shield to God. "I -- I can't serve in the church. If they found out what I've done, no one will accept me." And you've been pushing God back and pushing God back, and using it as a means or, if you will, as an excuse to stay kind of disconnected from the body of Christ, disconnected from serving, and shutting off the voice of God. Because somehow you think that your sin is greater than the grace of God. And Rahab -- she speaks to you, and says, "God doesn't care about your past. Faith changes your destiny." And Rahab, she speaks to you, and she says, "Put down all of your barriers, and put down all of your excuses, and put down all of the reasons that you've said to a thousand people, 'I can't do this because....'" And God brings you to Joshua 2, and introduces you to a lady who every woman in that city hated and every man shunned. And God says, "This is what I can do with faith."

Well, my friends, it not only speaks to those of you who have had a wall to God. It also speaks to us who at times can get impatient with people's transformation, and at times maybe even write off a meth addict that hits one of our security guards. It's easy to hate him. It's easy to fuel up. Until you read a story of a woman by the name of Rahab, and you say, "God, if you can do that to her, would you meet that young man in prison? I want you to bring lucidness to his mind, transformation to his heart. And would you sustain that church that's in the heart of this mess. Not with rage and anger, but with faith and hope." God delights in using flawed people to make beautiful plans. But sometimes, He needs your faith.

Years ago, if you were to walk out those front doors, you didn't have a parking garage. You'd walk through the city and you'd see the railroad being built, and pretty much everyone who was working on that railroad was a Chinese migrant worker. They lived in kind of fabricated homes. They couldn't own property -- they couldn't even sign a contract, to be quite honest with you. You couldn't enter into a contract with these folks. They had no legal, if you will, kind of power in our country. They all spoke Mandarin. Virtually none of them spoke English. There was a lady in our church -- Mrs. Baker -- strangely, I have never fathomed this out. When I get to Heaven, I want to ask her. Where did she learn Mandarin? Where did a pastor's wife in the 1870s and 80s learn Mandarin? But she did. And she grabbed her sidekick -- Mrs. Kenney -- and they went and started interacting with the Chinese workers, the migrant workers on the railroad, and they began to communicate to them, and she said to them, "If you never learn English, it's going to be really hard for you to succeed. And so, why don't you come over to our church" -- and, where they met was like right back there in that corner. Different building, but that's where it was.

And she began to teach them. She ran into Mr. Goon, and he was a sinner -- drank a lot. Hard worker. Would never go to church -- he was an atheist. She loved him; she served him. And she began to teach him, said, "I'll teach you English if you'll come." And they had classes two or three nights a week. Right there, over there in the corner, and she taught him as he came, and the only text that she ever used was the Bible. And lo and behold, Mr. Goon placed his faith in Christ.

What do you do when you see a Chinese migrant worker profess faith in Christ? Well, you do the natural thing -- you create a mission agency and you send them to China. At least, that's what I would have thought of -- right? You ship them over to China. And then, the country shifts, and communism takes route, and every missionary in that country gets kicked out. Every one of them. Some that we supported. But there was one individual -- he didn't get kicked out because he was Chinese. And Mr. Goon began to pastor the churches. And when communism came in and took over, and all the missionaries got kicked out -- Pastor Goon, saved right over there in that corner, led the church underground until he died. That's where my knowledge of the story ends. But I can only imagine -- I bet there's some grandchildren that are a part of the revival that are seeing 10,000 people every day come to Christ in China. And when we get to Heaven, somewhere off in the corner, there's gonna be Mr. Goon and Mrs. Baker and Mrs. Kenney. And the grandkids who are leading the church today are going to come and speak of the faith of a woman. Not Rahab. The faith of a woman who looked at a man and said, "If you place your faith in Christ, He'll change your life."

My friends, fast-forward. We stand on the shoulders of Rahab. And Mrs. Baker. And this city, and these people. To not condemn it but to look at it with faith. And to believe, "God, you're not shaken by this state. You're not perplexed by our leadership." If God has made a promise, then Rahab said, "Believe the promise." Because God delights in using flawed churches, just like ours, to make beautiful plans. It's not because we change our behavior. It's because we have faith. And when a church has faith, they're invincible.