



## **INFILTRATING JERICHO**

One of the charities MFC supports is TearFund, and one of their campaigns in recent years has been 'Children At Risk' – the saving of kids who have ended up in the sex industry or are in danger of it. And for some relief-workers that mission involves going into some of the most corrupt places in this world, to help set people free.

Now we may not be in a position to do that (though we can obviously make a difference). But as God's people, we have all been blessed with an amazing message – the good news of Jesus; and an equally amazing opportunity – to share it with others.

But to fulfil that mission, we have to be willing to step into enemy territory.

And that can be risky, as we'll see in this famous story.

### **Joshua 2**

Now you'd expect the main focus of this story to be the Israelite spies, but instead they have to share the limelight with someone else.

Rahab.

What do we know about Rahab? She's described as a *zonah*, a prostitute, and it's possible she was part of the fertility religion of the city (in fact, the name 'Jericho' comes from the Canaanite moon god *yarikh*, a fertility god). I.e. she was a damaged person, but brave too –

And God had a destiny for her.

Now the Book of Joshua is a picture of the mission of the church – and our own. So, what do we learn from this story?

**1) Know The Land You're Taking.** Joshua sends in the spies; they enter Jericho; and they end up staying in Rahab's shrine-brothel (and no, I don't think anything else is being suggested, just in case you're wondering).

But why send in spies? You could say it was to gain information on the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. Nelson Mandela once said, "To know your enemy, you must learn his favourite sport." Similarly, we need to understand not only our own worldview, but also the worldviews of others: religion, culture, people. How do you think Paul was able to quote Jewish scholars, Greek philosophers, Roman poets? Because he knew the world he was living in. Yes, we need to beware of compromise; but we need to beware of a Christian 'bubble-mentality', too.

But I believe the real reason the spies were sent in, as far as God was concerned, was to save Rahab and her family – to become a part of their lives; their world; their future. Because that is what God is about! And He shows us by eventually becoming the ultimate secret agent, in Jesus of Nazareth. He stepped into our world so that He could save the people within it – people like you and me. And we have been put here for the same reason.

We're called to infiltrate this town, this community.

Because there are Rahabs that need saving.

**2) Know The God You're Serving.** The 2 spies had obviously never done this sort of thing before, because what happens almost as soon as they enter the city? They get spied! Mission compromised! Maybe they're wearing something of Egyptian origin; maybe their accents give them away. But it isn't long before the King of Jericho has sent a unit of soldiers to hammer on Rahab's door. Rahab hides the spies; lies to the soldiers; and sends them on a wild goose chase. And then she has a talk with the spies (look at vs8-13 again).

What is Rahab saying? "I know what's coming and I'm choosing the winning side." And it's at this point that the spies would have realised something: that the Spirit of God had gone ahead of them – *40 years before!* The Israelites had been commanded to conquer the Promised Land, but because of a lack of faith and courage they didn't do it. Little did they know: the Canaanites were terrified of *them!*

God is greater than the situations we face. We might look at the world and think, "But they've got walls and weapons and horses and chariots! We can't compete with that!" Because it can be easy to look at the picture people project and see what they want us to see: security; happiness; contentment. Everyone has their 'wall of Jericho.' But get behind that wall and it isn't long before you realise people are not as sorted as they seem. And I believe there

are people out there, maybe people we know, who already realise they need something more than Jericho.

I.e. God is bigger than we think!

**3) Know The Hope He's Offering.** Rahab helps them escape via the window of her house, and they promise to spare both her and her family. But there's something else she has to do: she has to hang a scarlet cord from that window. Why? In Hebrew, the phrase *tiq'vat ha'shani* ('line of scarlet') sounds like another phrase, *tiq'vat ha'shnayim* ('hope of the two'). In hanging that cord, Rahab is saying "Their hope is *my* hope!"

But there's something deeper going on here. These events took place at Passover time, so that cord would have been a reminder to Israel of the blood of the lambs that were sacrificed at the first Passover (Exodus 12). Just as the Israelites had to trust in the blood daubed on the doorposts and lintels of their homes, Rahab had to trust in that cord. And ultimately, these things are a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus, who allowed Himself to be judged in our place, for our sins, on the cross.

Because yes, judgement *is* coming – if you have problems with that, you either don't know the world well enough, or you don't know God well enough. BUT ... there is hope, too. In Jesus. Hope of forgiveness. Hope of a new life. Hope of a new world! And so the biggest, most life-changing thing we can do is to point people to Jesus. In the things we do, yes – if they're going to know this hope is genuine, they need to *see* it – but also in the things we say.

Peter summed it up like this, in 1 Peter 3:15: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have ..."

### **Adopted Into God's Family**

What does this teach us about our own 'mission-field'? Like the spies, we too need to know this land, our God, and the hope He's offering.

Now take a look at Matthew 1:1-5. Rahab's faith not only saved her and her family, it led to her becoming a part of Jesus' genealogy – *His* family. And God's desire is that every family on earth should do the same. No matter who you are, where you've come from, or what you've done, Jesus offers you a lifeline. But you've got to take it!

If you're a Christian, God is calling you to be a spy, to infiltrate Jericho; if you're a non-Christian, God is calling you to be a Rahab.

Will you rise to the challenge?