

Surprising Saints

Faith Works!—Part 4

James 2:25—26

Introduction

If you've ever been to the emergency room, you have experienced "triage".

Triage is a French word which literally means, "to sort out" –to decide who needs treatment and who can wait and it was first used by the English speaking world in 1918.

Today, that word is commonly used in the medical community – it's the process of sorting out in emergency rooms. The nurse on duty determines who the people were with serious needs . . . and who isn't all that serious. Of course, if you've gone to the emergency room, it's because it's an emergency, right?

I've only been a couple times in my life, but every time I've been in there, I evidently haven't been sick enough to be seen for hours . . . you know what I mean?

I'm tempted to tell the nurse that I was attacked by a raccoon and I've got this urge to bite somebody – that'll work!

I have read that in World War II, the allies used the system of triage in makeshift hospitals near the front lines. It was the duty of the triage supervisor to color-tag the wounded. This tag would place them in one of three categories based on their condition.

One color tag was used for patients who were considered hopeless – that is, nothing could be done to save their lives.

Another color tag stood for hopeful – this meant the injured soldier would survive whether he

received help or not; they didn't need emergency treatment, and they could wait.

The third color tag was for patients marked as doubtful – in other words, these soldiers would possibly survive if they were given treatment. So much of the emergency medical treatment, as you can imagine, was directed to these particular patients.

Since the front lines were typically working with limited staff and limited supplies and equipment for surgery, medical assistance was given primarily to these soldiers who were tagged doubtful – they were the ones who might live if they were given surgery or careful treatment.

One soldier named Lou arrived at one of these makeshift hospitals, badly injured. He had been hit by shrapnel and one of his legs was completely shattered. He had also lost a lot of blood.

The triage supervisor who examined him made his decision and Lou was quietly coded as hopeless. His color tag basically communicated to the medical staff to make him as comfortable as possible, but not much more.

The nurse assigned to Lou noticed that he was conscious and they began to talk. They soon discovered they were both from Ohio.

Getting to know Lou as a person from her home state – and not just another wounded soldier – would lead this nurse to do something she was forbidden to do.

She slipped into the makeshift hospital that night and risked her job and future career by changing his color tag from hopeless to doubtful.

A few hours later, Lou was transported away from the front lines to a better medical facility. Months later, minus one leg, Lou recovered and ended up leading a full and long life, grateful for that nurse who changed his tag, which gave him another chance to live.

Let me say something that might come across as predictable or trite, but I want to say it anyway . . . **Jesus Christ is in the business of changing tags!**

When Christ went inside the house of that corrupt tax collector named Zaccheus, the crowd grumbled outside because Jesus was a guest with a man who was a sinner. That was his tag – sinner! But when Jesus came out on the porch with Zaccheus, He announced, *this man is now a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9)*

How is that for a name change?! He had been tagged a hopeless sinner, but by the grace of God, he was given the guarantee of God by virtue of faith in God to one day live with the saints of God in the presence of the glory of God. He had his tag changed from **hopeless** to **heaven-bound**.

What's your tag say today?

Now if you've been with us over these past studies you've watched as James defined and illustrated three different kinds of faith.

- Dead faith – that's words without works; It moves only the intellect through agreeing to facts
- Demonic faith – that's acknowledgment of Christ without a relationship with Christ; It moves the intellect and emotions, but no further;
- Dynamic faith – that's a faith that works because it's a faith that really does work; it moves not only the intellect and the emotions, but the will.

James illustrates dynamic faith for us by pointing our attention to the life of Abraham. By the time James wrote this letter, Abraham was of course the revered patriarch – the founding father of the faithful. He was the epitome of faith in action.

You get to the end of Abraham's biography and you're certainly struck by the grace of God simply because of the tests of faith that Abraham failed – but you are also and even more struck by the tests in which he succeeded.

- By faith he left his father and his homeland;

- By faith he believed God's promise of an heir;
- By faith he was willing to offer up his son Isaac to God.

Now you might come to the end of that kind of biography and conclude that God will never do anything with you and you might as well not even try to exercise dynamic faith because you can never measure up to Abraham.

He walked with God for 50 years . . . no wonder he's the example of dynamic faith.

James anticipated his congregation responding in that way – and so, led by the Spirit of God, James concludes his illustration of dynamic faith by showing us the life of an entirely different kind of person.

He has shown us the best of life and now he will show us the worst of life.

James chapter 2 and verse 25 provides James final illustration of dynamic faith. **25. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26. For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.**

James couldn't give us anybody more opposite to Abraham in every way than Rahab.

Contrasting Patriarch and Prostitute

Think for a moment of all the contrasts:

- Abraham was a man/Rahab was a woman – I thought I'd start with the obvious!
- Abraham was the original Hebrew – the father of the Jewish race/Rahab was an idolatrous Gentile;
- Abraham was a great leader/Rahab was a run of the mill citizen¹
- Abraham was at the top of his social setting context/Rahab was the next thing to the gutter
- Abraham was respectable and honorable/Rahab was dishonorable
- Abraham was the kind of man you'd think wanted everything to do with God/Rahab was the kind of woman you'd think wanted nothing to do with God.

Assuming you knew nothing about Rahab's biography, you would at least know from what James provides in this text that we're talking about a Patriarch and a prostitute, both demonstrating living, genuine, dynamic faith.

It's a long way from the Patriarch, to a prostitute – and that is part of what James has in mind.ⁱⁱ

You see the grace of God and the genuine demonstration of faith can take place in and through the life of redeemed Jews and redeemed Gentiles; an honorable man and a dishonorable woman are both surprising saints.

They are both trophies of grace, and to this day – your faith is not handicapped by your ancestry.ⁱⁱⁱ Your family name doesn't help or hurt your ability today to demonstrate dynamic faith in a living God.

God doesn't say, "Well, if you'd come from better stock, I might have had a ministry for you. I'm looking for people like Abraham." God is not handicapped by your ancestry, your pedigree or your past resume.

You might not pick that up by an illustration of Abraham, but James knows you will be struck by it through the illustration of Rahab.

Now, to better appreciate this illustration of Rahab by James, we need to travel back to the introduction of Rahab by Joshua.

So, take your Bibles and turn back to the Book of Joshua. It occurred to me that it's been a long time since I asked this congregation to turn to the Book of Joshua. I checked my notes and found that I preached through this book 19 years ago. Back then I had hair . . . and I didn't have glasses.

I also must have preached a lot faster because from what I could tell, we covered this entire Book (24 chapters) in 12 sermons.

That's just not right . . . now I take a sermon just to introduce the sermons. Well, I'm trying to mend my ways.

Now, if you weren't here 19 years ago, or you've never gone through this Book on your own, here's the background.

Joshua has taken over leadership as Moses has passed off the scene. The Israelite wandering of 40 years is about to end as the nation prepares to enter the Promised Land, promised to Abraham, by the way, back in Genesis chapter 12.

The Promised Land is already inhabited by idolatrous, wicked, brutal nations who aren't too excited about this promise thing—nor the coming judgment of God upon them of which they had received years of warning. We'll learn that from Rahab's own testimony.

Joshua decides to send out two spies to check out the first city they would encounter a city prepared for battle, a city surrounded by a wall,

named Jericho.

Notice the middle part of *verse 1 in Joshua chapter 2 where we're told that "these two men went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there."*

The word for harlot here is the Hebrew word, *zonah*, which can be translated harlot or innkeeper.^{iv}

If she was an innkeeper it would certainly resolve the tension you immediately feel. The problem is the New Testament clarifies for us that Rahab was no landlady. In fact, the word for Rahab in both New Testament passages where she appears is the word *porne* (πορνη) – which gives us our word for fornicator – it always has an immoral context.

She wasn't keeping an inn up there on the walls of Jericho, she was running a brothel. The question immediately surfaces – what are these men doing in Rahab's company?

I believe *verse 2* holds the answer – notice, ***It was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.***

In other words, then men were spotted when they entered the land – they might have been watched from the moment they waded across the Jordan River, perhaps at the ford closest Jericho.

The spies evidently knew they'd been spotted because as soon as they got to Rahab's brothel they asked to be hidden, and you might notice if you read the entire chapter that they spent the night on the roof not in the brothel.

Why there? One author suggested, "Where would someone go who didn't want to be asked questions? Where could he go for shelter and remain anonymous?"

Those are interesting thoughts, but I believe they miss the greater point. They were obviously led by God to just that house, and to that woman who was the only person in the entire city who was ready to believe in the God of Israel. God knew her heart. God already knew her desire.

Listen, she is the only person in all of Jericho who would be sympathetic to their cause.^v

It is no coincidence that these 2 spies—knowing they've been followed—rush into her place of business and hope for the best.

To their delight and probably much surprise, they found a woman ready to not only declare her faith in God but to demonstrate her faith in Him, and that's what James finds remarkable. It truly is!

Notice verse 3. And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” 4. But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5. It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.”

Did you notice that her answer to these military police that showed up at her door was about a dozen lies?

Now how could James talk so glowingly about her when she lied like a rug, right? How does she get into the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11?

Biblical ethicists talk about the hierarchy of ethics – demonstrated here by Rahab. In other words, there is a time when a higher moral principle is kept even if it requires disobedience to a lower moral principle.^{vi}

Think of it this way – suppose you were living in Holland during 1940 and the Nazi’s showed up on your doorstep and asked you if you were hiding any Jews in your closet? “Absolutely not.” Are you sure Mr. Ten Boom? I’m sure.

The moral principle upon that person to protect them from murder is higher, so to speak, than revealing their hideout.

If a would-be rapist crashed through your door at midnight and asked you if you had a wife or daughter, you’d say, “No, I’m a single man and all these decorations were my idea.”

I’m almost finished with the 2-volume autobiography of Charles Spurgeon, probably the most well known pastor in London during the 1800’s. At one point in his ministry- and up until his death- his brother, James, served with him as his co-pastor.

One evening there was a knock on the front door at the home of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon. The housekeeper wasn’t around and Spurgeon happened to be walking by and he opened the front door. In jumped a man brandishing a large knife and he announced that he had come to kill Charles Spurgeon. Charles Spurgeon told him, “He’s not here,” Charles said. “Well then, who are you?” Charles was able to convince this would-be assailant that he was actually talking to James, the brother of Charles. They looked similar. Charles was so convincing that the man finally ran back out the door – and was caught a few blocks away.

I’m not sure if Charles Spurgeon’s brother appreciated that – but it probably saved Charles’ life.

Frankly, the hierarchical approach doesn’t solve the problem. Someone could easily argue that telling the truth, which might have led to Spurgeon’s death, was God’s way of multiplying the gospel. We don’t know.

You could argue that Rahab should have told the soldiers, “Yes, those spies are up on my roof hiding under stacks of flax” and God could have performed a miracle and those spies would have been invisible. There isn’t any easy answer.

Rahab, without having had a course in the hierarchy of ethics, chose to protect the men’s lives by denying they were in her home.

Once the King’s guard was convinced and they left, Rahab went up on the roof and said in **verse 9. I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. 10. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; — now listen to her testimony – for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.**

Can you imagine? Moses would have been rolling over in his grave – if he’d been buried – to hear this.

Remember 40 years earlier, Moses sent out 12 spies—Joshua was one of them, but they came back and said, “We’ll never survive; the people in this Land are giants, and we are grasshoppers. We will never make it alive.” So God sent them on to wander for 40 years and not enter the Promised Land.

Rahab says that they have all been following the exploits of the children of Israel ever since they left Egypt 40 years earlier. They had heard about how God parted the Red Sea and drowned the Egyptian army.

Here it is, 40 years later, Rahab reveals their perspective all along—“We knew we didn’t stand a chance against your God, and we were terrified and our hearts melted with fear and awe at your God.”

Can you imagine all those Israelites who died in the wilderness, not allowed to enter the

Promised Land because they lacked dynamic faith—personal faith in the living Lord?

Now 40 years later – there is found among these pagans, a woman of faith in their God.

She not only believed, but she acted. She helped the spies to escape and followed their command to hang a scarlet chord out her window.

The usual Hebrew word for chord is bypassed in Joshua 2:12 and instead it is called a tiqwa – translated most often in the Old Testament by the word, “hope”.^{vii}

Hope! This was her only hope and she would stake everything upon it.

This chord was called in this same verse a pledge or a sign. It’s the same word used in that Passover scene in Exodus more than 40 years ago where the death angel was coming, but those who had the sign (the same word) which was the blood of the lamb on their doorpost, those homes who bore the sign were saved from death.

These words are not coincidences—they are Passover expressions of hope and redemption.

This woman is saved from death by her faith in God—He alone was her hope!

The Israelites had seen these miracles. They had been delivered time and time again; they had experienced the miraculous.

She had only heard . . . and she believed.

Listen, she was ready before those spies ever got there—ready to walk away from her idols and her customers . . . she was sick of her life . . . she knew the Israelites were coming.

She knew they followed the true and living God, no doubt she offered up some secret prayer, I know You are the God of heaven and earth, if You can forgive me and accept me, I will gladly follow you with living faith. Would you please change my tag from hopeless to hopeful. . . From a hopeless harlot to a forgiven follower. . . From sinner to a saint!

Before long the Israelites arrived outside the city gates. If you turn over to *chapter 6* you read in *verse 1 that Jericho was tightly shut—no one went out and no one came in.*

The Amorites were specifically mentioned in scripture as an idolatrous nation; they were known for their child sacrifices; they were cruel and most of all they hated the God of Israel.

The city of Jericho was filled with demonic faith. They knew the stories were true; they knew the God of Israel existed; they knew everything that Rahab knew, but they would not open their gates and lay down their arms—they would rather die

than surrender to God, and with one puff from the mouth of God, the walls of Jericho came atumblin’ down.

Which means either the little section of the wall upon which sat Rahab’s house is still standing (another miracle) or Rahab’s house was in the wall or next to the wall so that her home remained intact while the walls fell around her home.

I love this reunion of sorts in *verse 22.*

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the harlot’s house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her.”

Did you wonder if Rahab would be able to convince any of her family to hide out in her brothel?—which I’m fairly convinced has been out of business for some time.

Notice the answer in *verse 23. So the young men who were spied went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel while they burned the city with fire and all that was in it. Notice verse 25. Rahab the harlot and her father’s household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to his day.*

This scene becomes a metaphor of judgment and redemption. All who do not personally surrender to God will one day be judged by everlasting fire.

The only one who was spared was a harlot by the name of Rahab—she had a scarlet chord hanging from her window—you could see it waving in the wind.

Hebrews writes, *“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them who believed not.” (KJV Hebrews 11:31)*

Her faith in God preserved her place in eternity. Her demonstration of faith preserved for her a place in history.^{viii}

Not all of us can identify with someone like Abraham, but all of us can identify with someone like Rahab.

We have all played the harlot—worshipping other gods, following after idols—certainly the chief idol of our own selves and sinning against the true and living God.

To this day all who believe in Him—no matter their checkered past—when you come to place your faith in Him alone—when you throw out the scarlet chord of redemptive hope, you are spared His judgment, and he changes your tag.

So the Apostle Paul would write to church after church in the New Testament and greet all the believers by calling them by their new tag—saints in Christ Jesus! So now . . . live as saints would live.

As James wraps up his concluding statement found in *James chapter 2 and verse 26* – he effectively says that Abraham’s and Rahab’s acts of faith were like spirit to a body, the life principle that animates a living human being.

This is dynamic faith to the believer’s life. It is the animating principle, moving the believer to action, ever provoking the believer toward a living demonstration of faith in his living Lord.

That’s the exhortation of James to the believer. **If you believe – behave like it.**

Now, I want to take one more look at that scene just outside Jericho before we close. Joshua informs us that Rahab and all her family were put outside the camp where they stood, gathered around them were all their family members, all the children, nieces, nephews, grandma and grandpa, their suitcases, blankets, and pillows. All in a big huddled mass, with tears of relief and yet sorrow as they watched their city burn to the ground.

I wonder what Rahab thought as she watched her city and her past burn away. Her profession of faith would lead to a different profession in life.

I wonder if she thought while she stood there watching Jericho burn, would these people – these Israelites with their strange customs, would they and their God truly receive and accept me? Will the God of Heaven and earth take me in as a

proselyte believer? Will He accept my faith in Him? Oh would He ever . . . would He ever.

It isn’t long before she is the talk of the nation— a heroine for dynamic faith—against all odds- saving the spies and turning to the true and living God

There’s more to her biography. She meets and marries a godly Jewish man named Salmon— imagine he chose her, a converted Gentile to be his wife.

They would have a son, and they named him Boaz. He would grow up, and would you believe it, he would choose a Gentile convert to be his wife as well—a new believer—named Ruth.

Rahab the harlot would become the great, great, grandmother of King David.

She would show up again in Matthew chapter 1 along with Ruth her daughter-in-law in the Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

You see, Jesus Christ not only came for sinners, He came from a line of sinners!

Follow this – Jesus Christ, the God—man, took on flesh with blood flowing in His veins, not only Jewish blood, but oh, there were strains of Gentile blood as well.

He would choose a bride that includes Gentiles!

For all of us who believe, Jew and Gentile, He changes our tag . . .

- from hopeless to hope filled;
- from lost to found;
- from someone with a checkered past to someone with a glorious future;
- from sinner to saint

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- i John MacArthur, James (Moody Press, 1998), p. 140
- ii Adapted from Tony Evans, The Perfect Christian (Word, 1998), p. 98
- iii Spiros Zodhiates, The Labor of Love (AMG Publishers, 1985), p. 65
- iv Dale Ralph Davis, No Falling Words: Expositions of the Book of Joshua (Baker, 198), p. 29
- v Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James (Zondervan, 2008), p. 141
- vi Ibid
- vii Dan G. McCartney, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James (Baker Academic, 2009), p. 171
- viii Evans, p. 98