

Christmas Hope: Rahab

DARRELL DELANEY

History is a funny thing. When we look back and think of it, we often see something different than what actually happened; but if we look even closer, we see not only history but his-story—God moving and actively being involved in history. We see that today in the story of Rahab, and although her story starts off in a challenged place, God uses her powerfully. May that become hope for our story as we look at this Advent episode of *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, this is the second of a five-episode series on the first seventeen verses of Matthew; and Matthew continues to surprise his audience by choosing to add women in this genealogy. That is something you just don't do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; or you certainly don't choose the women he did. You might choose upright women like Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel and Leah, the four matriarchs of Israel, but the first four women that Matthew includes in Jesus' family tree didn't exactly have...most of them anyway...didn't exactly have squeaky-clean backgrounds. Their stories have a lot of pain in them, some sorrow, some trauma; and as we have pointed out in the first program of this series, which was on Tamar from Genesis 38, some of these stories aren't quite the ones that you tell in Sunday school. Tamar's doesn't get told at all in Sunday school; and if some of these other women's stories get told, they often get cleaned up, because they can be a little bit raw.

DARRELL DELANEY

I know that there are some "sanitized" versions of these stories for children, but as adults and people who have been seasoned in the Word, the Bible we know is not squeamish about drama in people's lives. There is often brokenness all over the place. I mean, it shows, like you said in the last episode, why Jesus had to come; and we also see that in this story there is no shortage of pain, suffering, challenge, and hardship; but in this case, we are looking at Rahab, and Rahab is one of the four women that Matthew mentioned. This is the one that we need to search other places in scripture to find her story, and it picks up in Joshua Chapter 2. So, let's look at Joshua Chapter 2, where we see her story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then Joshua, son of Nun, secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and reentered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. ²The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." ³So 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." ⁴But 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." ⁵At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I do not 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 stalks of flax that she has laid out on the roof.) ⁷So 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.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, Scott, when I was in seminary, I was taught to get the context of what is going on in this story, and I had a question that was kind of curious. At this time, I am wondering why did they end up at Rahab's house in the first place? Scripture does tell us that they entered into the house, and it also tells us that she is a prostitute. Somehow, the king found out about it, but what is going on there?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I don't know how they ended up there. I was always given the impression that after they had been discovered they ducked in there, but the text says they went in there first. So, I am not sure how that happened, but clearly, this is an unlikely place for them to receive help, put it that way.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

At the very least, if you are in trouble, going into a brothel or into the house of a prostitute doesn't look like a ticket to getting saved or delivered, but that is where they are. We should also just say really quickly, backing up just a little bit, Darrell, Tamar, who we looked at in the first episode of this five-part Advent and Christmas series...that was in Genesis...and that was, you know, long before the nation of Israel was formed. So, now we are in Joshua. So, on the other side of the exodus, on the other side of the forty years of wandering, finally they are getting ready through Joshua to do the conquest of Canaan and get into the Promised Land; and this is sort of their first foray of spying out the land to figure out the best strategy, but these spies must not have been very good spies, because it seems like they got sniffed out almost immediately. Somebody ratted on them. Something happened, and it got all the way up to the king.

DARRELL DELANEY

I don't think it is the goal of the spies to be found out if they are sneaking around, but they end up finding a place to hide in Rahab's house; and so, it is interesting that Rahab, who is not an Israelite, ends up helping these Israelites and lying to the Jericho men sent from the king to make sure that they are not found; and the fact that she hides them means that she showed them a great kindness at risk to herself, because she could have gotten herself into a lot of trouble if she would have been found out what she did.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And at this point in the story...we are going to move on in a few moments in the program; later we will find out a little bit more about Rahab...but at this point in the story, you don't expect her to put her own neck on the line by lying to the Jericho cops, right? The police come, you tell the truth. She doesn't. She just brazenly lies, and even sends them on a wild goose chase. You know, she basically says: Oh, yeah; there were some guys here, but they left. Hurry; you might catch them. It is almost like a cartoon, you know.

DARRELL DELANEY

They went that-a-way!

SCOTT HOEZEE

They want that-a-way; and so, indeed, the Jericho forces head out into the wilderness, the gate shuts behind them, and spies are safe and snug up on the roof, hiding underneath some flax and some, you know, leaves and materials and whatnot. So, what is going on? Why does she show them this kindness? I would imagine the men probably did not expect it. I mean, it would have taken nothing for Rahab to say: Yep, they're here; right over there. She probably would have curried favor with the king; might have gotten a reward; but she doesn't, she risks her life.

DARRELL DELANEY

What I understand about this story is something that is really deep to me, was that you think about Rahab and her history, they literally tell us that she is a prostitute, but even people with the dirtiest labels and the most checkered past actually do have the capability of helping someone and making good choices. It doesn't matter what they have done, it doesn't mean that they cannot decide to do something different or to do something better, even though society has labeled them or someone else has labeled them. So, this story specifically turns that notion on its head. The second thing is that sometimes standing up for righteousness can actually be detrimental to you. It could get you in a world of trouble; it could put you in harm's way as opposed to moving you out of the way; and at that time, you have to decide what you will do. Now, Rahab, we see has chosen to help these men. It could have cost her her life at that point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and we will find out later...I mean, she will get away with it. The spies will make a clean getaway eventually, and she won't be found out; but again, the question really hanging in the air here is, here is a foreigner...a Jerichoite from the land of Canaan; so, a Canaanite and a Jerichoite; no connection to Israel whatsoever; seemingly has no skin in the game in terms of helping people from Israel. So, the question is why in the world did she do it? Why did she lie to the cops? Why didn't she just turn these guys in and then go to bed and sleep well? Well, we are going to find out in just a moment so of the reasons why, and they turn out to be really interesting reasons. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are talking about the second of four...really five...women who Matthew mentions in his family tree...his genealogy of Jesus in those first seventeen verses of Matthew Chapter 1. We might think that opening a gospel with a long list of father of, father of, father of family tree is boring, but Matthew was writing for, we said in the first program, a Jewish reading audience; and for those who already believed Jesus was the Messiah, he was confirming that. For those who had not yet believed Jesus was the Messiah, Matthew was establishing Jesus' credibility; but his including four women who were all foreigners to Israel was also his first opening salvo to say: the Messiah came for more than just Israel; and in this case, in this program, we are seeing that through Rahab.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really powerful for Matthew to intentionally include the names of these women in the genealogy. He wants to make the case that he wants to minister to these people through the world, but he is also showing that they are actually colorful stories that go with these names. Each name has a story attached to it, and today we are in Rahab's story, based on her name.

We are continuing in Chapter 2 of Joshua; verse 8 starts this way: ⁸Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof ⁸and 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. ¹⁰We 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. ¹¹When 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, wow; now we start to understand why Rahab put her life on the line, lying to the king's men no less, that these spies...yes, they had been there, but they left...go ahead and chase them, you might catch them yet.

The reason is, God's reputation is preceding him...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What an interesting thing. You know, sometimes you can think: Well, you know, all this stuff happened to Israel kind of in isolated corners, and you know, who back in that day...well, we know about it because we have the Bible...but who back in that day would have heard...well, it turns out what God did in Egypt, what God did to Pharaoh, what God did dividing the Red Sea, that has traveled far and wide; and Rahab, and she indicates a lot of people in Jericho and in Canaan, have heard of the God of Israel; and they figure that if the God of Israel is coming, they had better get out of his way; because, she says here...how interesting...for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below; and in the ancient world in Hebrew, that is known as a *merismos*. You get it in Genesis 1: God created the heavens and the earth...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a *merismos*. You take the highest point and the low point, and that stands for everything. So, Rahab is saying: Your God is the God of everything; and if we try to oppose him, we are toast; and that is why I am helping you. I have fear of your God. Literal fear, but also reverence.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; you mentioned that the Lord's renown has been traveling around over this region. She makes it clear that she knows that the Lord has given the Israelites the land as well. So, not only does she hear about what God did to these other kings, but she also knows that the Lord has given them the land, which with this information, she says: It is better to show favor to these Israelites than to lie to a few Jericho cops, if you will, than it is to become a casualty of this conquest; and so, what is deeper is that this lady, who knows nothing of God, who is a Canaanite—who is a Jerichoite—she names the Lord God, the God of heaven and the God of earth, and that testimony and that testifying is really powerful in a place where they have hundreds of idols. So, that shows that God can pretty much save anyone no matter what background they have, no matter how many mistakes they make, it is relieving to me to know that we serve a God who can save anyone and bring them to the point of confession.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We said earlier we are not a hundred percent sure exactly how or why the spies ended up in the house of a prostitute, but I am pretty sure the last thing they expected in that place was to hear the prostitute deliver a sermon, and tell *them* the truth of their God, right? I mean, talk about a turnabout of events that you couldn't possibly see coming. Rahab preaches the truth of Israel's God to them...wow! But let's pick up the action here, and I am just going to skim over a few verses in Joshua 2, beginning at verse 12, because Rahab does want to live. She does want a little something back in return for her kindness. So, she says in verse 12: "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 ¹³that 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." (Then they say): ¹⁴"Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her.

So, then they talk a little bit more. She says: I am going to let you go...but eventually we get that famous line where they say, you know: After we leave...she is going to let them down by the scarlet rope...

DARRELL DELANEY

Scarlet...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Leave it hanging in the window so when we come to Jericho, we will see it and we will make sure that we go to your house first to get you out before the city falls. So, she agrees, they agree. They go back, and in verse 23 they went down the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua, and they told him everything that had happened to them. So, there is the deal they cut, and there is what is going to become the future salvation of Rahab and her family.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is beautiful that we see all of this being exchanged here, promises on both sides, and these covenants are bound, not just because they are interpersonal between one another, but because it is considered that they would be before God, who is paying attention to all these details. I love their response: Our lives for your life...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that response. It seems like, in this day, we have lost...we lack luster and promise-making in these days. We have to sign so many promissory notes and when you sign over for a house you have to make sure your signature is there in the fine print. They will take you to court for this stuff, but back then, it was “our life for your life”. The covenant was clear, and Rahab believed in the Lord God and demonstrated it by helping God’s people. She was excited about being able to do that, and she did not keep her physical safety in high regard, which we mentioned earlier.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, her witness...her example lives on in James. In James 2:25, 26, James writes to his readers back in the days of the early Church: ²⁵In the same way, was not even the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

So, this ties in with James’ key theme, that if you say you have faith, but it never shows up in your life, then it is just so much talk; but when you have faith, it shows up in what you do. Rahab had faith, and she lived it out, and the fruit of her faith was saving these men.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, she proved that she believed, and she demonstrated it by saving these men, and that is what she is being commended for, even though she has this background, that is not the point of what James is saying; and in just a minute, we want to get into some practical applications of this passage, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this second program in a five-part Advent and Christmas series from Matthew Chapter 1, and particularly the genealogy—the family tree—and we have been looking at the story today on this episode, Darrell, of Rahab, who is a great, great, great...grandmother ultimately of Jesus; and she has a very unlikely origin story. She was a prostitute in the pagan city of Jericho, in the pagan land of Canaan, and we just saw, remarkably enough though, that this foreign woman, doing a somewhat tawdry occupation, shall we say, knew about God and preached a little sermon to the Israelite spies, praising their God, and saying she wanted to be on that God’s side, so please spare my life when God comes to take Jericho.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Rahab is what my undergrad professor at Kuyper College, Dr. Dan Kroeze, called a “faithful foreigner”, because she did not grow up as an Israelite. She had nothing to do with Israel until the interaction, but she is testifying to the Lord being the God of heaven and earth. She is also demonstrating that faith she has by

helping them and doing a kindness to them, at great risk to her own life; and Hebrews 11 talks about a whole bunch of people who have this faith of things they did not see, and that is the evidence of substance for pleasing God with this faith, and we see there is a verse there for Rahab.

In Chapter 11:31, it says: By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

So, technically, Rahab is being applauded for what she did to save these spies so that they could go over and get the land that God had promised them in the first place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is amazing; this prostitute, who comes from out of nowhere in the book of Joshua, now we have seen mentioned twice in the New Testament. We just saw it in the previous segment of this program, Darrell, James commends her, and now the writer of Hebrews commends her; in that long, hall-of-fame roll call of the faithful, Rahab gets a shoutout. Her actions have resonated all through history; and now, of course, the third mention of Rahab would be in Matthew. So, at least three times in the New Testament this foreign prostitute named Rahab is mentioned as a hero of the faith; but as we close out the program, Darrell, I mean, we sort of get to the “so what” again. What does this have to do with us? Well, I mean, there are lots of things we could say. So, let’s admit that eventually Rahab stops being a prostitute. She eventually gets married in Israel, and that is how she then delivers a child who leads to Jesus. As we said in the first program, a reminder that even Jesus’ story cannot get told without some difficult elements reminding us that that is why Jesus came, to save us from our sins. So, Rahab didn’t stay a prostitute, but she is a great reminder, as we said a few moments ago. God can and does use anybody; don’t count yourself out; don’t think that your own past disqualifies you. God likes to use everybody to be his servants, to accomplish his will.

DARRELL DELANEY

And just to be on the record, we are not asking everyone to be like Rahab or do what Rahab did. What we are saying...I mean, we know we need to be like Jesus, right? But what we are also saying is that it doesn’t matter what your background is, or what you have done, God can use you. God can restore you. God can heal you; but also, there is always the decision and the choice you have to do what is right; and you know, what you have done in the past doesn’t have to permanently define who you are. We can change, and God gives us the strength to do that. He also gives us forgiveness, which we find in Romans 8:1, where it says:

There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That is beautiful to see, that God can redeem us from these mistakes, and then we can have the stories that he can be glorified in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And everybody is potentially a candidate for that; and again, who would have imagined that this particular person that the spies just seemed to have stumbled into, but of course, we now recognize here too the hand of God’s providence, leading these people to the person they needed to meet, who not only would save their lives, and therefore, open the door for Israel to begin to come into the Promised Land at long last after forty years of desert wandering, but also a chance to save this person and her family, and then she and her family take their place in Jesus’ family line; and as we have also said, Darrell...and again, this should be encouraging, I think, for all of our lives...the Bible could so easily have left out some of these stories, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Matthew could so easily have not bothered to mention Tamar, who acted like a prostitute to trick her father-in-law into sleeping with her. That was sort of an awkward story we saw in the previous program in this series. Rahab, being a prostitute, is awkward to acknowledge, but none of it stops God; none of it delays God; and the Bible is very willing to admit: Yes, these things happened; this is exactly what happened; this is exactly who was related to Jesus. You might think these are skeletons in Jesus’ family closet; I am putting

the skeletons right out there, Matthew says, because this is a story of grace...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus is all about grace. In John's gospel he came full of grace and truth; and so, Matthew is telling the background of Jesus, also full of grace and truth.

DARRELL DELANEY

And what is exciting about that as we turn toward Christ here is that we see Rahab put herself in risk of danger of her life, but Christ went the full way, and he laid his life down for us. So, she did this so that the Israelites could get the inheritance that God had promised them, and she doesn't lose her life, but Christ ended up losing his life as the penalty for our sins and our atonement. He gives us the *real* Promised Land, which happens to be the rest in him, according to Hebrews; and we have a new relationship with him that he demonstrated with us while we were still sinners.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The stories that get referred to in Matthew's genealogy are fraught with sin. Tamar and Judah's story was fraught with sin; Rahab's story...Ruth's story, which we will see in the next episode, not so much...but certainly, even King David...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The last of the first four women will be Bathsheba...that story is saturated in sin. You cannot tell Jesus' story without telling the story of our human sin, but that is why Jesus came, because while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That is the gospel in a nutshell, and it is really basically what Matthew is preaching to us, and preaching to his original audience by including these stories in Jesus' family tree. It is all grace, it is all grace, thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of the women in Jesus' genealogy by looking at Ruth's story.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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