

Matthew 1:3-6&16
(Joshua 2:1-21; Hebrews 11:31)
“Disappointment with God: Broken People”

Introduction

Last Sunday, we focused on the theme of broken promises, looking at Abraham and David as examples of people tempted to be profoundly disappointed with God, tempted to think that God had failed to keep his promises to them. And yet, however much the Scriptures humanize them, David and Abraham still tower over us, still intimidate us into asking whether God can really use the likes of us unless we become magisterial, history-shaping patriarchs or kings.

This morning, we turn from the theme of broken promises to the theme of broken people, focusing on the women in Jesus' family tree. The listing of their names is itself significant. Ancient genealogies only listed mother's names if they were well known and significant figures in the history being recorded. So, why do these particular women's names appear? Why are their stories recorded in Scripture, and why are they featured in Jesus' genealogy?

Body

1. Five Women

Tamar (Genesis 38): Broken by neglect and injustice, fear and prejudice.

Rahab (Joshua 2): Broken by whatever drove her into the life of a prostitute.

Ruth (Ruth 1f): Broken by being widowed and dependent on charity.

Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11): Broken by being seduced by a powerful man.

Mary (Matthew 1): Broken by being given the highest and hardest calling.

2. Rahab the Prostitute

Of all the women, perhaps the most striking is Rahab, because she plied her trade as a prostitute in a city destined for destruction, yet was accepted into the heart of the people of God, married into the royal tribe of Judah, and bore a noble son, Boaz, who rescued Ruth in her time of need, and was a direct ancestor of King David, as well as of Messiah Jesus. Most striking is the fact that she is one of only two women (the other being Sarah, wife of Abraham) listed by name in the great roll call of heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11.

Why was she alone saved of all the citizens of Jericho? Why was a prostitute welcomed into the bosom of Israel? Why did she marry so well? Why is she featured by the author of Hebrews as a model of faith that pleases God? The only reason given in Hebrews 11 is, “she had given a friendly welcome to the spies” (Hebrews 11:31). Isn’t that what prostitutes do, give a friendly welcome to whoever comes knocking at their door? The book of Joshua tells us much more, and what it tells is both striking and instructive.

Rahab had heard the stories of what the Lord had done to Israel’s enemies. The stories had terrified the inhabitants of the Promised Land, including the citizens of Rahab’s city, Jericho, situated at the fords of the Jordan, where Israel was sure to cross. They realized that they would likely be the first to test the might of this nation moving like locusts through the hill country just across the river. They knew the power of the kings that Israel had defeated, and knew that their God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, the most powerful nation of their day. Everyone else in her city was planning how to thwart the purposes of this powerful God. They trusted in their high walls and impregnable gates. No one had successfully attacked them, and they were not about to surrender without a fight. Vigilance was the order of the day. They must not allow the city to be surveyed by spies. Anyone caught doing business with Israel would be judged a traitor.

But Rahab believed in the power of this God who could set captives free, and make them a nation that others feared. This God was different from the gods of her city, gods of stone who could not act in answer to prayer, gods who demanded much, but gave little, gods who did not care for slaves or prostitutes. So Rahab formed an unbelievably bold plan. She determined that, if given the opportunity, she would seek the approval of this great God, would seek to aid his conquest of her city and of her land, and to become one of his people.

It is one thing for a powerless person to dream such a thing, but quite another to do it. When the spies came to the city, and found their way to her house, she knew she was taking her life in her hands. What if the king found out? And, of course, the king did find out, and sent word asking her to turn over the spies. Imagine her dilemma: She had it in her hands to become a hero to her people by turning in the spies. She might thwart their conquest of the city, and become a rich and highly favored courtesan in the process. If she tried to aid the spies, and was caught, she would surely die a traitor’s death.

Yet she never hesitated. She believed that the God of Israel was able to deliver her, and without the benefit of the Torah, without the Ten Commandments and the sacrificial system to guide her or a community of faith to support and encourage her, she trusted what she knew of God, obeyed his purposes radically, even putting her life on the line, and – as they say – the rest is history.

3. Two Lessons

Let me simply offer two lessons from the lives of each of these women, but especially from Rahab's life:

First, your past does not ultimately matter. Morality cannot save you, and immorality cannot sink you, if you turn to God for grace and a new beginning. We each have a past. The gospel tells us that in Jesus Christ, we can have a future gloriously different from our past.

Second, God saves those who cast themselves upon his grace. Each of these women reached a place of quiet desperation, and each submitted to the Lord. Each became a vessel through whom God brought salvation to the world.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, that is the calling God gives to each one of us: to bring him into the world, into *our* little part of the world, so that the world might be saved through him. When we are tempted to think of how daunting such a calling is, it is good to remember such people as these, who out of their brokenness turned with all their hearts to the living God, threw themselves upon his grace, and found so much more than forgiveness: they found life and meaning that still speaks to us across the centuries, and that calls us to follow in their steps.

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