

Rahab's Faith

A Sermon

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“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.”—[Hebrews 11:31](#).

IN ALMOST every capital of Europe there are varieties of triumphal arches or columns, upon which are recorded the valiant deeds of the country's generals, its emperors, or its monarchs. You will find, in one case, the thousand battles of a Napoleon recorded, and in another, you find the victories of a Nelson pictured. It seems, therefore, but right, that faith, which is the mightiest of the mighty, should have a pillar raised to its honor, upon which its valiant deeds should be recorded. The apostle Paul undertook to raise the structure, and he erected a most magnificent pillar in the chapter before us. It recites the victories of faith. It begins with one triumph of faith, and then proceeds to others. We have, in one place, faith triumphing over *death*; Enoch entered not the gates of hades, but reached heaven by another road from that which is usual to men. We have faith, in another place, wresting with *time*; Noah, warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, wrestled with time, which placed his deluge a hundred and twenty years away; and yet, in the confidence of faith, he believed against all rational expectation, against all probability, and his faith was more than a match for probability and time too. We have faith triumphing over *infirmity*—Abraham begetteth a son in his old age. And then we have faith triumphing over *natural affection*, as we see Abraham climbing to the top of the hill and raising the knife to slay his only and beloved son at the command of God. We see faith, again, entering the lists with the infirmities of *old age* and the pains of the last struggle, as we read, “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.” Then we have faith combating the allurements of a wealthy court. “By faith Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” We see faith dauntless in courage when Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, and equally patient in suffering when he endured as seeing him who is invisible. We have faith dividing seas, and casting down strong walls. And then, as though the greatest victory should be recorded last, we have faith entering the lists with sin, holding a tournament with iniquity, and coming off more than a conqueror. “Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.” That this woman was no mere hostess, but a real harlot, I have abundantly proved to every candid hearer while reading the chapter. I am persuaded

that nothing but a spirit of distaste for free grace would ever have led any commentator to deny her sin.

I do think this triumph of faith over sin is not the least here recorded, but that if there be any superiority ascribable to any one of faith's exploits, this is, in some sense, the greatest of all. What! faith, didst thou fight with hideous lust? What! wouldst thou struggle with the fiery passion which sendeth forth flame from human breasts? What! wouldst thou touch with thy hallowed fingers foul and bestial debauchery? "Yea," says faith, "I did encounter this abomination of iniquity; I delivered this woman from the loathsome chambers of vice, the wily snares of enchantment, and the fearful penalty of transgression; yea, I brought her off saved and rescued, gave her purity of heart, and renewed in her the beauty of holiness; and now her name shall be recorded in the roll of my triumphs as a woman full of sin, yet saved by faith."

I shall have some things to say this morning concerning this notable victory of faith over sin, such as I think will lead you to see that this was indeed a supereminent triumph of faith. I will make my divisions alliterative, that you may recollect them. This woman's faith was *saving faith*, *singular faith*, *stable faith*, *self-denying faith*, *sympathising faith*, and *sanctifying faith*. Let no one run away, when I shall have expounded the first point, and miss the rest, for you can not apprehend the whole power of her faith unless you remember each of those particulars I am about to mention.

I. In the first place, this woman's faith was SAVING FAITH. All the other persons mentioned here were doubtless saved by faith; but I do not find it specially remarked concerning any of them that they perished not through their faith; while it is particularly said of this woman, that she was delivered amid the general destruction of Jericho purely and only through her faith. And, without doubt, her salvation was not merely of a temporal nature, not merely a deliverance of her body from the sword, but redemption of her soul from hell. O! what a mighty thing faith is, when it saves the soul from going down to the pit! So mighty is the ever-rushing torrent of sin, that no arm but that which is as strong as Deity can ever stop the sinner from being hurried down to the gulf of black despair, and, when nearing that gulf, so impetuous is the torrent of divine wrath, that nothing can snatch the soul from perdition but an atonement which is as divine as God himself. Yet faith is the instrument of accomplishing the whole work. It delivers the sinner from the stream of sin, and so, laying hold upon the omnipotence of the Spirit, it rescues him from that great whirlpool of destruction into which his soul was being hurried. What a great thing it is to save a soul! You can never know how great it is unless you have stood in the capacity of a saviour to other men. You heroic man who, yesterday, when the house was burning, climbed the creaking stair-case, and, almost suffocated by the smoke, entered an upper chamber, snatched a babe from its bed and a woman from the window, bore them both down in his arms, and saved them at the peril of his own life, *he* can tell you what a great thing it is to

save a fellow-creature. Yon noble-hearted youth who, yesterday, sprang into the river, at the hazard of himself, and snatched a drowning man from death, he felt, when he stood upon the shore, what a great thing it was to save life. Ah! but you can not tell what a great thing it is to save a soul. It is only our Lord Jesus Christ who can tell you that, for he is the only one who has ever been the Saviour of sinners. And remember, you can only know how great a thing faith is by knowing the infinite value of the salvation of a soul. "Now, by faith, the harlot Rahab was delivered." That she was really saved in a gospel sense as well as temporally, seems to me to be proved from her reception of the spies which was an emblem of the entrance of the word into her heart, and her hanging out of the scarlet thread was an evidence of faith, not unaptly picturing faith in the blood of Jesus the Redeemer. But who can measure the length and breadth of that word—*salvation*. Ah! it was a mighty deed which faith accomplished when he bore her off in safety. Poor sinner! take comfort. The same faith which saved Rahab can save thee. Art thou literally one of Rahab's sisters in guilt? She was saved, and so mayest thou be, if God shall grant thee repentance. Woman! art thou loathsome to thyself? Dost thou stand at this moment in this assembly, and say, "I am ashamed to be here; I know I have no right to stand among people who are chaste and honest?" I bid thee still remain; yea, come again and make this thy Sabbath house of prayer. Thou art no intruder! Thou art welcome! For thou hast a sacred right to the courts of mercy. Thou hast a sacred right; for here *sinners* are invited, and thou art such. Believe in Christ, and thou, like Rahab, shalt not perish with the disobedient, but even thou shalt be saved.

And now there is some gentleman in the audience who says, "There's a gospel for you; it is a kind of sanctuary for wicked men, unto which the worst of people may run and be saved." Yes, that is the stale objection which Celsus used against Oigen in his discussion. "But," said Origen, "it is true, Celsus, that Christ's gospel is a sanctuary for thieves, robbers, murderers, and harlots. But know this, it is not a sanctuary merely, it is an hospital too; for it heals their sins, delivers them from their diseases, and they are not afterwards what they were before they received the gospel." I ask no man to-day to come to Christ, and then continue his sins. If so, I should ask him to do an absurdity. As well might I talk of delivering a Prometheus, while his chains are allowed to remain upon him and bind him to his rock. It can not be. Christ taketh away the vulture from the conscience, but he taketh away the chains too, and maketh the man wholly free when he doeth it all. Yet, we repeat it again, the chief of sinners are as welcome to Christ as the best of saints. The fountain filled with blood was opened for black ones; the robe of Christ was woven for naked ones; the balm of Calvary was compounded for sick ones; life came into the world to raise the dead. And O! ye perishing and guilty souls, may God give you Rahab's faith, and you shall have this salvation, and shall with her stand yonder, where the white-robed spotless hosts sing unending hallelujah to God and the Lamb.

II. But mark, Rahab's faith was a SINGULAR FAITH. The city of Jericho was about to be attacked; within its walls there were hosts of people of all classes and characters, and they knew right well that if their city should be sacked and stormed they would all be put to death; but yet, strange to say, there was not one of them who repented of sin, or who even asked for mercy, except this woman who had been a harlot. She, and she alone was delivered, a solitary one among a multitude. Now, have you ever felt that it is a very hard thing to have a singular faith? It is the easiest thing in the world to believe as every body else believes, but the difficulty is to believe a thing alone, when no one else thinks as you think; to be the solitary champion of a righteous cause when the enemy mustereth his thousands to the battle. Now, this was the faith of Rahab. She had not one who felt as she did, who could enter into her feelings and realize the value of her faith. She stood alone. O! it is a noble thing to be the lonely follower of despised truth. There be some who could tell you a tale of standing up alone. There have been days when the world poured continually a river of infamy and calumny upset them, but they stemmed the torrent, and, by continued grace, made strong in weakness, they held their own until the current turned, and they, in their success, were praised and applauded by the very men who sneered before. Then did the world accord them the name of "great." But where lay their greatness? Why, in this, that they stood as firm in the storm as they stood in the calm—that they were as content to serve God alone as they were to run by fifties. To be good we must be singular. Christians must swim against the stream. Dead fish always float down the stream, but the living fish forces its way against the current. Now, worldly religious men will go just as every body else goes. That is nothing. The thing is to stand alone. Like Elijah, when he said, "I only am left and they seek my life;" to feel in one's self that we believe as firmly as if a thousand witnesses stood up by our side. O! there is no great right in a man, no strong-minded right, unless he dares to be singular. Why, the most of you are as afraid as you ever can be to go out of the fashions, and you spend more money than you ought because you think you must be respectable. You dare not move in opposition to your brethren and sisters in the circle in which you move; and therefore you involve yourselves in difficulties. You are blindfolded by the rich fabric of fashion, and therefore many a wrong thing is tolerated because it is customary. But a strong-minded man is one who does not try to be singular, but who *dares* to be singular, when he knows that to be singular is to be right. Now, Rahab's faith, sinner as she was, had this glory, this crown about its head, that she stood alone, faithful among the faithless found."

And why should not God vouchsafe the same faith to thee, my poor, sinning, but contrite hearer? You live in a back street, in a house which contains none but Sabbath breakers, and irreligious men and women. But if you have grace in your heart you will dare to do right. You belong to an infidel club; if you should make them a speech after your own conscience, they would hiss you; and if you forsook their company, they would persecute you. Go and try them. Dare them. See, whether you can do it; for if you are afraid of men, you are taken

in a snare which *may prove your grief* and *is now your sin*. Mark you, the chief of sinners can make the most daring of saints; the worst men in the devil's army, when they are converted, make the truest soldiers for Jesus. The forlorn hope of Christendom has generally been led by men who have proved the high efficacy of grace to an eminent degree by having been saved from the deepest sins. Go on, and the Lord give you that high and singular faith!

III. Furthermore, this woman's faith was A STABLE FAITH, which stood firm in the midst of trouble, I have heard of a church clergyman who was once waited upon by his church warden, after a long time of drought, and was requested to put up the prayer for rain. "Well," said he, "my good man, I will offer it, but it's not a bit of use while the wind is in the east, I'm sure." There are many who have that kind of faith: they believe just so far as probabilities go with them, but when the promise and the probability part, then they follow the probability and part with the promise. They say, "The thing is likely, therefore I believe it." But that is no faith, it is sight. True faith exclaims, "The thing is unlikely, yet I believe it." This is real faith. Faith is to say, that "mountains, when in darkness hidden, are as real as in day." Faith is to look through that cloud, not with the eye of sight, which seeth naught, but with the eye of faith, which seeth every thing, and to say, "I trust him when I can not trace him; I tread the sea as firmly as I would the rock; I walk as securely in the tempest as in the sunshine, and lay myself to rest upon the surging billows of the ocean as contentedly as upon my bed." The faith of Rahab was the right sort of faith, for it was firm and enduring.

I will just have a little talk with Rahab this morning, as I suppose old Unbelief did commune with her. Now, my good woman, don't you see the absurdity of this thing? Why, the people of Israel are on the other side of Jordan, and there is no bridge: how are they to get over? Of course they must go up higher toward the fords; and then Jericho will be for a long time secure. They will take other cities before coming to Jericho; and, besides, the Canaanites are mighty, and the Israelites are only a parcel of slaves; they will soon be cut in pieces, and there will be an end of them; therefore, do not harbor these spies. Why put your life in jeopardy for such an improbability? "Ah," says she, "I do not care about the Jordan; my faith can believe across the Jordan, or else it were only a dry-land faith." By-and-by, they march through the Jordan dry shod, and then Faith gets firmer confidence. "Ah!" says she, secretly within herself, what she would willingly have said to her neighbors, "will you not now believe? will you not now sue for mercy?" "No," they say; "the walls of Jericho are strong; can the feeble host resist us? And lo on the morrow the troops are out, and what do they do? They simply blow a number of rams' horns; her neighbors say, "Why, Rahab, you do not mean to say you believe now? They are mad." The people just go round the city, and all hold their tongues, except the few priests blowing rams' horns. "Why, it is ridiculous. It were quite a new thing in warfare to hear of men taking a city by blowing rams' horns." That was the first day; probably the next day Rahab thought they would come with scaling-ladders and mount the walls; but no, rams' horns again, up to the seventh day; and this

woman kept the scarlet thread in the window all the time, kept her father and mother, and brothers and sisters in the house, and would not let them go out; and on the seventh day, when the people made a great shout, the wall of the city fell flat to the ground; but her faith overcame her womanly timidity, and she remained within, although the wall was tumbling to the ground. Rahab's house stood alone upon the wall, a solitary fragment amid a universal wreck, and she and her household were all saved. Now would you have thought that such a rich plant would grow in such poor soil—that strong faith could grow in such a sinful heart as that of Rahab? Ah! but here it is that God exercises his great husbandry. “My Father is the husbandman,” said Christ. Any husbandman can get a good crop out of good soil; but God is the husbandman who can grow cedars on rocks, who can not only put the hyssop upon the wall, but put the oak there too, and make the greatest faith spring up in the most unlikely position. All glory to his grace! the great sinner may become great in faith. “Be of good cheer, then, sinner! If Christ should make thee repent, thou hast no need to think that thou shalt be the least in the family. O! no; thy name may yet be written among the mightiest of the mighty, and thou mayest stand as a memorable and triumphant instance of the power of faith.

IV. This woman's faith was A SELF-DENYING FAITH. She dared to risk her life for the sake of the spies. She knew that if they were found in her house she would be put to death; but though she was so weak as to do a sinful deed to preserve them, yet she was so *strong* that she would run the risk of being put to death to save these two men. It is some thing to be able to deny ourselves. An American once said, “I have got a good religion; it's the right sort of religion; I do not know that it costs me a cent a year; and yet I believe I am as truly a religious man as anybody.” “Ah!” said one who heard it, “the Lord have mercy on your miserable stingy soul, for if you had been saved you would not have been content with a cent a year”—a halfpenny per annum! I hazard this assertion, that there is nothing in the faith of that man who does not exercise self-denial. If we never give any thing to Christ's cause, work for Christ, deny ourselves for Christ, the root of the matter is not in us. I might call some of you hypocrites: you sing,

“And if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great,
That I could give him all.”

Yes, *but you would not, though*; you know better than that, for you do not, as it is, give all, no, nor yet half, nor yet the thousandth part. I suppose you think you are *poor* yourselves, though you have got some thousand pounds odd a year, and so you keep it yourself, under the notion that “he that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.” I don't know how else it is you make your religion square with itself, and be at all consistent. This woman said, “If I must die for these men, I will; I am prepared, bad name as I have, to have a worse name still;

as a traitor to my country I am prepared to be handed down to infamy, if it be necessary, for having betrayed my country in taking in these spies, for I know it is God's will it should be done, and do it I will at every hazard. "O men and brethren, trust not your faith, unless it has self-denial with it. Faith and self-denial, like the Siamese twins, are born together, and must live together, and the food that nourisheth one must nourish both. But this woman, poor sinner as she was, would deny herself. She brought her life, even as that other woman, who was a sinner, brought the alabaster box of precious ointment, and broke it on the head of Christ.

V. Not to detain you too long, another point very briefly. This woman's faith was A SYMPATHISING FAITH. She did not believe for herself only; she desired mercy for her relations, Said she, "I want to be saved, but that very desire makes me want to have my father saved, and my mother saved, and my brother saved, and my sister saved." I know a man who walks seven miles every Sabbath to hear the gospel preached in a certain place—a place where they preach *the* gospel. You know that very particular, superfine sort—the gospel, a gospel, the spirit of which consists in bad temper, carnal security, arrogance, and a seared conscience. But this man was one day met by a friend, who said to him, "Where is your wife?" "Wife?" said he to him. "What! does she not come with you?" "O! no", said the man; "she never goes anywhere." "Well, but," said he, "don't you try to get her to go, and the children?" "No; the fact of it is, I think, if I look to myself that is quite enough." "Well," said the other, "and you believe that you are God's elect, do you?" "Yes." "Well, then," said the other, "I don't think you are, because you are worse than a heathen man and a publican, for you don't care for your own household; therefore I don't think you give much evidence of being God's elect, for they love their fellow-creatures." So sure as our faith is real, it will want to bring others in. You will say, "You want to make proselytes." Yes; and you will reply, that Christ said to the Pharisees, "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte." Yes, and Christ did not find fault with them for doing so; what he found fault with them for was this—"When ye have found him ye make him tenfold more the child of hell than yourselves."

The spirit of proselyting is the spirit of Christianity, and we ought to be desirous of possessing it. If any man will say, "I believe such and such a thing is true, but I do not wish any one else to believe it, I will tell you, it is a lie; he does not believe it, for it is impossible, heartily and really to believe a thing, without desiring to make others believe the same. And I am sure of this, moreover, it is impossible to know the value of salvation without desiring to see others brought in. Said that renowned preacher, Whitefield, "As soon as I was converted, I wanted to be the means of the conversion of all that I had ever known. There were a number of young men that I had played cards with, that I had sinned with, and transgressed with: the first thing I did was, to go to their houses to see what I could do for their salvation, nor could I rest until I had the pleasure of seeing many of them brought to the Saviour." This is a first-fruit of the Spirit. It is a kind of instinct in a young Christian. He must have

other people feel what he feels. Says one young man, in writing to me this week, "I have been praying for my fellow-clerk in the office; I have desired that he might be brought to the Saviour, but at present there is no answer to my prayers." Do not give a penny for that man's piety which will not spread itself. Unless we desire others to taste the benefits we have enjoyed, we are either inhuman monsters or outrageous hypocrites; I think the last is most likely. But this woman was so strong in faith that all her family were saved from destruction. Young woman! you have a father, and he hates the Saviour. O! pray for him. Mother! you have a son: he scoffs at Christ. Cry out to God for him. Ay, my friends—young people like myself—we little know what we owe to the prayers of our parents. I feel that I shall never be able sufficiently to bless God for a praying mother. I thought it was a great nuisance to be had in at such a time to pray, and more especially to be made to cry, as my mother used to make me cry. I would have laughed at the idea of any body else talking to me about these things; but when she prayed, and said, "Lord, save my son Charles," and then was overcome, and could not get any further for crying, you could not help crying too; you could not help feeling; it was of no use trying to stand against it. Ah! and there you are young man! Your mother is dying, and one thing which makes her death-bed bitter is, that you scoff God and hate Christ. O! it is the last stage of impiety, when a man can think lightly of a mother's feelings. I would hope there are none such here, but that those of you who have been so blessed, as to have been begotten and brought forth by pious men and women may take this into consideration—that to perish with a mother's prayers is to perish fearfully; for if a mother's prayers do not bring us to Christ, they are like drops of oil dropped into the flames of hell that will make them burn more fiercely upon the soul for ever and ever. Take heed of rushing to perdition over your mother's prayers!

There is an old woman weeping—do you know why? I believe she has sons too, and she loves them. I met with a little incident in company, the other day, after preaching. There was a little boy at the corner of the table, and his father asked him, "Why does your father love you, John?" Said the dear little lad, very prettily, "Because I'm a good boy." "Yes," said the father, "he would not love you if you were not a good boy." I turned to the good father and remarked that I was not quite sure about the truth of the last remark, for I believed he would love him if he were ever so bad. "Well," he said, "I think I should." And said a minister at the table, "I had an instance of that yesterday. I stepped into the house of a woman who had a son transported for life, and she was as full of her son Richard as if he had been prime minister, or had been her most faithful and dutiful son." Well, young man, will you kick against love like that—love that will bear your kicks, and will not turn round against you, but love you straight on still? But perhaps that woman—I saw her weep just now—had a mother, who has gone long ago, and she was married to a brutal husband, and at last left a poor widow; she calls to mind the days of her childhood, when the big Bible was brought out and read around the hearth, and "Our Father which art in heaven" was their nightly

prayer. Now, perhaps, God is beginning some good thing in her heart. O! that he would bring her now, though seventy years of age, to love the Saviour! Then would she have the beginning of life over again in her last days, which will be made her best days.

VI. One more head, and then we have done. Rahab's faith was a SANCTIFYING FAITH. Did Rahab continue a harlot after she had faith? No, no, she did not. I do not believe she was a harlot at the time the men went to her house, though the name still stuck to her, as such ill names will; but I am sure she was not afterward, for Salmon the prince of Judah married her, and her name is put down among the ancestors of our Lord Jesus Christ. She became after that a woman eminent for piety walking in the fear of God. Now, you may have a dead faith which will ruin your soul. The faith that will save you is a faith which sanctifies. "Ah!" says the drunkard, "I like the gospel, sir; I believe in Christ;" then he will go over to the Blue Lion to-night, and get drunk. Sir, that is not the believing in Christ that is of any use. "Yes," says another, "I believe in Christ;" and when he gets outside he will begin to talk lightly, frothy words, perhaps lascivious ones, and sin as before. Sir, you speak falsely; you do not believe in Christ. That faith which saves the soul is a real faith, and a real faith sanctifies men. It makes them say, "Lord, thou hast forgiven me my sins; I will sin no more. Thou hast been so merciful to me, I will renounce my guilt; so kindly hast thou treated me, so lovingly hast thou embraced me, Lord, I will serve thee till I die; and if thou wilt give me grace, and help me so to be, I will be as holy as thou art." You can not have faith, and yet live in sin. To believe is to be holy. The two things must go together. That faith is a dead faith, a corrupt faith, which lives in sin that grace may abound. Rahab was a sanctified woman. O that God might sanctify some that are here! The world has been trying all manner of processes to reform men: there is but one thing that ever will reform them, and that is, faith in the preached gospel. But in this age preaching is much despised. You read the newspaper you read the book; you hear the lecturer; you sit and listen to the pretty essayist; but where is the preacher? Preaching is not taking out a manuscript sermon, asking God to direct your heart, and then reading pages prepared beforehand. That is reading—not preaching. There is a good tale told of an old man whose minister used to read. The minister called to see him, and said, "What are you doing John?" "Why, I'm prophesying, sir." "Prophesying; how is that? You mean you are reading the prophecies?" "No, I don't; I'm prophesying; for you read preaching, and call it preaching, and I read prophecies, and, on the same rule, that is prophesying." And the man was not far from right. We want to have more outspoken, downright utterances of truth and appeals to the conscience, and until we get these, we shall never see any very great and lasting reforms. But by the preaching of God's word, foolishness though it seem to some, harlots are reformed, thieves are made honest, and the worst of men brought to the Saviour. Again let me affectionately give the invitation to the vilest of men, if so they feel themselves to be,

"Come, ye needy, come and welcome,

God's fine bounty glorify:
True belief and true repentance—
Every grace that brings us nigh—
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.”

Your sins will be forgiven, your transgressions cast away, and you shall henceforth go and sin no more, God having renewed you, and he will keep you even to the end. May God give his blessing, for Jesus sake! Amen.