

SEVEN MOTHERS PART TWO

Last week we started our study of seven women in the Bible who were used by God to bring a blessing to the world. Last week we looked at:

Eve – the mother whose child was killed, a mother who lost both of her children to murder and condemnation, yet chose to keep her heart open and conceive another child. This decision resulted in her becoming the nine times great-grandmother of Noah. She is proof that being open to God can create spiritual tsunamis that can reverberate throughout succeeding generations.

Sarah – the mother who couldn't conceive became, at age 90, the mother of Isaac, the son of promise. She is proof that nothing is impossible with God unless you close yourself off to His power; for when God makes a promise, even old age cannot stand in the way of its fulfillment.

Rachael – the mother who died in childbirth. Before her death she bore two children. Her firstborn, Joseph, through his own personal tragedy, became the second highest ruler of Egypt, saving Israel from famine. Rachael is an example that even in death a mother can have a profound impact on the world simply by giving birth. Rachael is proof that children can go on to do great things even if all they have is their mother's DNA.

What Eve, Sarah and Rachael all had in common was their faith. As we shall see, the two women we will look at today, Rahab and Ruth, also share this same common denominator. Like many of us these women did not start out as believers in the One True God. But their circumstances thrust them into the lives of those who loved and served the God of Israel. It is through their encounters with people of faith that these two women were able to impact the world.

Most people are unaware that the lives of Rahab and Ruth intertwine. With two books and forty-five chapters separating their stories one is hard pressed to believe they were even alive at the same time, let alone that they knew each other. But as part of our study of both Ruth and Rahab I'll show you how and where their lives interconnected. Let's start with Rahab – the mother with a sordid past.

RAHAB – The Mother With A Sordid Past

Rahab is best known not by who she was but rather by what she did. One was something to be ashamed of, the other was something to be proud of. We are first introduced to Rahab when Joshua sent two spies to view the land they were about to enter. When they came to Jericho Scripture says, *“They went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab and lodged there”* (Joshua 2:1). So Rahab was a harlot who lived in the town of Jericho. But Rahab was not just a harlot. She was a smart woman, well aware of what was happening around her. And she was a caring woman as we shall shortly see.

The king of Jericho, aware of the fact that the men who had entered Rahab's house were there to spy out the land, asked Rahab to bring the men out to him. But Rahab had already taken the men and hidden them. So she admitted that the men had come into her home but lied and said they had left at dark when it was time to shut the gate. She then suggested that the men of Jericho hurry and try to overtake them.

After they had left Rahab admitted to the two spies that the whole town had heard how the Lord

had dried up the water of the Red Sea so they could pass through, and of what the Israelites had done to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan River. When the people of Jericho heard this the Scriptures say, *“(their) hearts had melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of (them); for the Lord (their) God, (was) God in heaven above and on earth beneath”* (Joshua 2:11).

So Rahab, because of her kindness and anxious to avoid death for herself and her family, asked the men to make a pledge to spare her and her family when they came back to conquer Jericho. The men pledged to deal kindly and faithfully with her and together they arranged for a sign to alert the Israelite’s which house was hers so as to avoid destroying anyone inside. When the walls of Jericho fell down flat the first instruction Joshua gave to the two men who had spied out the land dealt with the safety of Rahab and her family.

JOSHUA 6:22-25

“Go into the harlot’s house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her’. So the young men who were spies went in and brought 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...”

“They burned the city with fire, and all that was within it....However, Rahab the harlot and her father’s household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.”

It’s interesting to note that every time the name Rahab was mentioned the profession she practiced was also mentioned. She was not simply Rahab. She was Rahab the harlot. Even when Rahab appears on the list of people of great faith found in Hebrews 11 it says that *“by faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”* And when James mentions her in his letter he also addresses her as Rahab the harlot (James 2:25). At least when they mention what she did for a living they also mention what she did to help Israel conquer Jericho. They do give her credit for that much.

Whether she continued to practice harlotry for any length of time is unknown, but being consistently called Rahab the harlot begs the question - can you ever live down your past? Can you ever out live the names you have been called or the things you have done to deserve such names? Was Rahab ever known by any other name other than Rahab the harlot?

Sometimes we remain trapped in the past, unable to move away from who we were. This can be a result of our own mindset or purely the mindset of others. And sometimes no matter what we do to change people’s opinions about us, they never do. To them we are always who we were and never who we have become.

But every now and then we are lucky enough to find someone who sees past our past, someone who sees what we can become rather than what we have been. Evidently Rahab found that person. When Matthew lists the genealogy of Jesus, Rahab appears on the list as the wife of Salmon who was the great, great grandfather of King David. But what is more amazing is that Rahab is mentioned only by her given name and not by her profession. Matthew lists her as Rahab, not Rahab the harlot. It seems, at least with Mathew, that even a distant connection to Jesus is enough to delete the sin of evil deeds from your name.

All of us have sinned and have a past. Most of us have spent a lifetime trying to live a life far away from our past mistakes. To those who know us the longest we may still be called by the

nickname that associates us with our past. But to those who have known redemption, those who have walked the road of sin and found cleansing in the Lord, they know that we are not who we were and we are not what we did. We are what God has made us into - new creatures in Christ, cleansed from all the failures of the past.

Jesus has turned our past into history. He knows our name and it does not contain a description of what we were. Like Simon whom Jesus called Peter, our name describes what we have the potential to be. It contains a description of what we have become, never of what we were. Jesus will reveal that name to us when we reach heaven. For in Revelation 2:17 Jesus says, *“To him who overcomes, to him I will give some hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”* This is seemingly what happened to Rahab.

I once counseled with someone who was deeply sorrowful over the things which he had done. He was consumed with guilt and despair. Filled with hopelessness he saw himself only as someone who had and was sinning, never as someone who had even a chance of forgiveness. When I spoke seven little words to him his perspective changed because he began to see himself in a different light. It wasn't the words I said but rather the power of the Spirit behind them that caused the change. What I said was confirmed in his mind and heart by the Holy Spirit. And all I said was, *“You are not what you have done.”*

Of course I went on to explain that when God looks at the heart and sees repentance, He sees possibilities, He sees a new creature, He sees the old passing away and the new coming to fruition. When sin is confessed it is tossed into the depths of the sea, never to be drug up again. He simply had the wrong idea of God. Satan had wrapped him in the chains of deceit for many years. But when the truth of God's love shed light on the lie he found himself released from shame and deception.

With prayer and a little more counseling he was able to start down a new path – one which led to the arms of forgiveness and cleansing. No longer shackled to the past, he was able to build a new life. Out of the stagnation of his sin came a new lease on life. Out of the lie of the past came this simple truth - all have sinned and fall far short of the glory of God, but all can find forgiveness in Christ. And with forgiveness comes a cleansing from past sins. What can wash away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Like my friend, Rahab is an example of what is possible when you leave the past behind and embrace by faith the future that God has in store for you. It is never too late to desire change, to seek after something more worthy than what you have known. God will take the smallest step and turn it into a highway that will lead you out of sin and into the cleansing power of God. One only has to believe that what you are now does not have to be what you will be in the future. By faith, and with the help of God, you can become something other than what you have done. Just ask Rahab. Through her union with Salmon their son Boaz was born. And here is where her connection to Ruth comes into play.

RUTH – The Mother Who Had Lost A Husband

Ruth was the daughter-in-law of Naomi, a woman from Israel. Naomi and her husband moved from Israel to the land of Moab due to a prolonged famine in Israel. During their stay their two sons married Moabite women. Ruth was one of these women.

But tragedy struck Naomi's household when she lost both her husband and her two sons. Without a husband or a son to provide for her Naomi was now destitute as were her daughters-in-law. The law of Israel said that when a man's brother dies he is to marry his brother's widow in order to

provide an heir. But since both of Naomi's sons died there was no possibility of this occurring. So when she heard the famine in Israel was over she decided to move back to her home in Bethlehem.

Both of her daughters-in-law started back with her but Naomi begged them to stay in Moab. One of them turned back but Ruth would not leave Naomi. This is when Ruth utters her famous words, *"Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."* What neither of them knew at that time was that Ruth's devotion to Naomi would not only prove to be a turning point in their personal history but also for the history of the nation of Israel as well.

So here you have two women with no husbands or sons to care for them, coming back to Naomi's home town with no way to provide for themselves. Knowing the compassion that comes from the Law concerning the poor and the widows, Naomi is hoping they can at least glean food from the surrounding fields and that her relatives who still live in the town will also come to their aid.

When they arrived in Bethlehem it was the beginning of the barley harvest. So Ruth asked to go to the field and glean among the ears of grain in a field where she might find favor. Gleaning could be a dangerous thing to do for an unmarried woman, as the workers and other gleaners frequently took advantage of such women. But God was watching over them both and soon Ruth found herself in the portion of the field that belonged to a man named Boaz. Not coincidentally, Boaz was a relative of Naomi's husband and a man of great wealth.

Like all great love stories produced by Hollywood, Boaz sees Ruth from afar and is intrigued by her. At first his righteous nature seeks only to assure her safety. Then, upon finding she is a relative, he tells her not to go to any other field to glean grain. He then tells his workers to purposely pull out some grain from their own gatherings and leave it behind for Ruth. He also instructs his servants not to touch her, but to leave her alone while she gleans.

When Naomi finds out that Ruth has been treated so kindly by Boaz she sees an opportunity for a kinsman redeemer. A kinsman redeemer was a close relative who had the same responsibility as a brother to provide an heir for his dead brother's wife. Since there were no brothers to provide an heir for Ruth the next nearest relative was asked to step up and redeem the widow and provide an heir. Boaz was not the closest relative to Naomi, but the one who was decided to pass on his obligation. So Boaz agreed to be Ruth's kinsman redeemer, and shortly thereafter they were married.

The story of one woman who becomes a widow is sad enough. To have it happen to three women in the same family is beyond tragic. How does a family recover from such events? How much sorrow can one family endure? And can they ever expect joy to reappear in their lives after such a tragedy as this?

We don't know what happened to Orpah, the daughter-in-law who stayed behind in Moab. But we do know what happened to Ruth and Naomi. For them the Scripture that says, *"Sorrow may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning"* came true (Psalm 30:5). Ruth remarried and became a mother and Naomi a grandmother.

Sometimes tragedies can define our lives. Because of the depth of the impact negative events can have, some people become what they have experienced; Reliving the tragedy they continually breathe in their sorrow and daily exhale it wherever they go through their words, their thoughts and their emotions.

Naomi was initially like this. When she returned to her home town of Bethlehem she told the women of the city,

“Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:20-21).

Naomi spoke out of the despair she felt and the multiple losses she had experienced. Yet standing right beside her was the hope of a better future. Through her unwillingness to leave Naomi, Ruth displayed her devotion and strength of character to stay the course in spite of the tragedies they both had experienced.

Ruth understood that the loss of something was not the loss of everything. When Ruth said that Naomi’s God would be her God she was not just giving lip service, or even simple honor to her mother-in-law. Ruth meant what she said. Unlike the God of Moab, who was known as the destroyer and demanded human sacrifice, the God of Israel was the God who saves and rescues. Ruth was eager to leave behind the one who destroys and seek after the One who restores.

Ruth was not content to live in sorrow any more than she was content to stay in Moab. Ruth looked to the future. Ruth also took her obligations seriously. She would not shirk her duty to her mother-in-law simply because the ties to her had been severed by death. Though Naomi was willing to let her go, Ruth was not willing to let Naomi go. Ruth would remain faithful to her and stay by her side as her encourager.

Like Ruth, God does not leave the sorrowful alone but rather comes along side to sustain, strengthen and encourage us. It is this continual perseverance of character that allows the Lord to bring healing and blessing to our lives. When Ruth left Moab she left the past behind, burying her sorrow with her husband. When she entered Bethlehem she embraced the future that lie before her. She did not guard her heart in order to prevent further hurt but rather opened her heart to both Naomi and to Boaz. And as a result Ruth became the great grandmother of King David.

So what is the connection that Ruth and Rahab have in common? If you haven’t already guessed, it’s this: Ruth married Rahab’s son Boaz making her Rahab’s daughter-in-law. So it’s highly likely that Ruth and Rahab had family dinners together, celebrated the Passover and other Feasts together, and, as relatives united by marriage, were together for the birth of their children and grandchildren.

MATTHEW 1:5-6

“Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king.”

Amazing to think how God joined together a former Jericho prostitute and a former Moabite widow and, through marriage, grafted them into the family line of David. Ruth and Rahab, persevering through adversity, became the great grandmother and the great-great grandmother of the one whom God called *“A man after my own heart”* (1 Samuel 13:14). Who says you have to be defined by your past? Ruth and Rahab are living testimonies that you do not. They testify that your future has more potential than what your past reveals.

That is the message of the gospel: You do not have to be what you have done. You do not have to be what you have become. You can be what God intended you to be – free from the past, free from

the shame, and free from the lies of the enemy.

God has a new name for all of us written on a white stone which He will someday give to us. And when He does it will be a reminder that God has wiped away all the tears over the past, all the sorrows from our former life, and all the pain of what we had done. It is a name which we do not yet know, which no one knows but the One who gives it. But we will know and understand what that name is when we receive it. It will have nothing to do with what we have done for we are no longer defined by what we have done. But rather it will reflect who we have become through faith in Christ.

Rahab and Ruth were two women who were not born into the faith but became greatly influenced by those who were. Through their sacrifice and devotion to those they loved they found a peace which they had not known, and a destiny beyond what they were capable of on their own.

1 Corinthians 2:9 says, “*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived all that God has in store for those who love Him.*” If you feel trapped by your past, take a lesson from Ruth and Rahab. Like them you do not have to be defined by what you have done. You can choose to be defined by what you believe and how you put that belief into action. You never know what possibilities lay ahead when you trust your future to the One who holds it in His hands. There are good works that God has created for all who love Him to walk in. Take a step down that path and leave the past behind. Like these two women, you may even become a part of something that will help usher in the Messiah.

NO EYE HAS SEEN

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard
No mind has conceived what the Lord has prepared
But by His Spirit He has revealed
His plan to those who love Him*

*We've been held by His everlasting love
Led with lovingkindness by His hand
We have hope for the future yet to come
In time we'll understand the mystery of His plan*

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard
No mind has conceived what the Lord has prepared
But by His Spirit He has revealed
His plan to those who love Him*

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