

What You Become  
Joshua 3:1-21 (ZCC1.1.15)

*Joshua the son of Nun secretly sent two men out of Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, including Jericho." They went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and slept there. The king of Jericho was told, "Behold, men of the children of Israel came in here tonight to spy out the land." Jericho's king sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered into your house; for they have come to spy out all the land." The woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I didn't know where they came from. About the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, the men went out. Where the men went, I don't know. Pursue them quickly. You may catch up with them." But she had brought them up to the roof, and hidden them under the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. The men pursued them along the way to the fords of the Jordan River. As soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate. Before they had lain down, she came up to them on the roof. She said to the men, "I know that Yahweh has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how Yahweh 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 to Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, and there wasn't any more spirit in any man, because of you: for Yahweh your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by Yahweh, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a true sign; and that you will save alive my father, my mother, my brothers, and my sisters, and all that they have, and will deliver our lives from death." The men said to her, "Our life for yours, if you don't talk about this business of ours; and it shall be, when Yahweh gives us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you." Then she let them down by a cord through the window; for her house was on the side of the wall, and she lived on the wall. She said to them, "Go to the mountain, lest the pursuers find you. Hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward, you may go your way." The men said to her, "We will be guiltless of this your oath which you've made us to swear. Behold, when we come into the land, tie this line of scarlet thread in the window which you used to let us down. Gather to yourself into the house your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. It shall be that whoever goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood will be on his head, and we will be guiltless. Whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand is on him. But if you talk about this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless of your oath which you've made us to swear." She said, "Let it be as you have said." She sent them away, and they departed. Then she tied the scarlet line in the window.*

When we lived on the North Carolina coast, one of the things I loved to do was check out the steel-hulled fishing boats under construction on Radio Island near Morehead City.

Now I understand how boats float. I know that no modern boat material—not carbon fiber or Fiberglas or aluminum or Kevlar will float if it is in sheets or in an un-shaped form. I know this, but yet the idea of a boat made of steel has always been a bit foreign to me.

It just seems “wrong” that you can build a properly-shaped skeleton of steel beams and weld steel plate to it and then put it in the water and yet it doesn't go to the bottom.

Of course it doesn't matter that all the parts and pieces are made of steel, because that steel is made into the hull of a boat and it floats very well, thankyouverymuch.

Some years ago I was looking in the classified ads in the back of a magazine and I saw plans for building a sailboat out of concrete?

Maybe that idea is even more foreign than a steel boat. If you throw a piece of steel into the water, what happens? If you throw a chunk of concrete into the water, what happens? THEY SINK!

Like I said, I understand that it is not about the material but it is the amount of water displaced that makes the difference. It is the fact that the material is shaped into a hull that displaces more water than it weighs.

It doesn't matter what the original characteristics of the material were. What matters is what it was shaped into in the end.

Do you remember Joseph? The spoiled-brat favorite-son who was self-centered and who rubbed his half-brothers' noses in the fact that Daddy loved him best until he practically DESERVED to be thrown into a pit and be sold into slavers? You remember that Joseph?

Do you remember that after many trials and difficulties he was put into a place of authority in Egypt and in the middle of a famine that he was the salvation of his family—literally the salvation of the people of Israel?

I am going to assume that you know Peter's story. You know, the man who was known as Simon but who Jesus re-named Petros or literally “the rock.” You know—the one who tried to walk on water and sunk like a piece of concrete that was NOT shaped into a hull. You know—the one who was a coward who abandoned Jesus as lied when he denied him three times. Those things did not ultimately matter.

What mattered was that he became the head of the church at Jerusalem and that he became a great teacher and that he healed the sick and that he was willing to die for his faith in Jesus.

It seems that just like those boat-building materials, it is what we become that really matters. God doesn't look at what we were. In a sense, he doesn't even look at what we are. He is interested in what we can become.

A little while ago I sort-of read the story of a woman who was unclean and unworthy to stand in the ranks of God's people. When this story was actually happening, her past and her present made her less than desirable—less than worthy to serve The Living God.

And yet, serve she did.

By that service, she and her family were saved from certain destruction. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Joshua, she was allowed to live among the Israelites. Even more amazing is that in Hebrews 11 she is named among the faithful and judged to be righteous in James 2.

It isn't clear, but she MAY even be the woman mentioned in Matthew 1:5 as the mother of Boaz and great-grandmother of King David. If that is so, then she was actually in the family line of Jesus of Nazareth.

Let's look again at the story.

As the people of Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, one of the first and biggest obstacles in their way was the city of Jericho. Seeking a way to get the upper hand, Joshua sent out spies into the land.

Since Jericho was the gateway city to Palestine and a large city with a fair amount of trade, then I'm guessing the plan was just to blend in with the traveling merchants and strangers who came and went.

Jericho had two walls and they were built about 15 feet apart. Wooden beams were placed on or in the two walls—and houses were literally suspended between those two walls.

I don't know exactly why they sought out Rahab's house. Certainly one reason was that it was on the wall. They were young and strong and probably well trained in battle—but I imagine that when it was nearing time to shut the gates, they felt pretty scared. Spending the night someplace where they could possibly get away was a good idea and certainly comforting to scared young men.

The translation I read called her a prostitute. Other translations say she was a harlot or a loose woman—but the Hebrew isn't really clear. She may have been an innkeeper and if she was that might explain why the men went there. It seems that innkeepers were known to be a bit unsavory and they were sometimes called pimps or prostitutes even if they weren't actually in that business.

Either way, it would not have been unusual for strangers to stay at her house. And they didn't care about her character—they just cared about getting information and getting out of Jericho alive.

Still, I think we can look at her character and see some positive things. Things that we could aspire to. Six of them, in my estimation.

1. She was industrious. Besides her inn-keeping or whatever it was she was known for—apparently she wove linen from flax. When she hid the young men, she hid them among the bundles of flax drying on her roof.

2. She was clever and quick-witted. When she found out who the men were, she saw that she could use all this to her advantage. We can see it from the quick answer she gave when questioned by the king. “Yeah, they were here, but they JUST left. Boy, it betcha that if you really hurry, you can catch them.” Sounds like an old cartoon I remember, “Which way did he go George, which way did he go?”

3. She cared about her family. When she struck the deal with Joshua's spies, she included her extended family. According to what is written in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter, not only was she saved, but so were her brothers, sisters, father, and mother.

4. She was courageous. She literally put her life on the line when she lied to the king and help the spies. She certainly would have been executed as a traitor for helping them get away.

5. She feared God—in the more positive sense of respect and awe. The people of Jericho feared the Israelites—and apparently so did others in the Promised Land. They feared what the people of Israel could do under the leadership and power of God. Her speech in verses 9-11 indicated an over-all fear of God, but she clearly understood more deeply than her people did.

6. She acknowledged God as THE God. In the last part of verse 7 she makes a statement about God—a true statement—that could have come from the lips of Joshua or Moses or Abraham or Noah, the great people of faith. In fact, it looks a lot like a confession of faith in the Hebrew God: *for Yahweh your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath.*

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, events to come also indicate that she did believe in God and that she did honor and serve him.

When all the plans were in place, Joshua sent out the Ark of the Covenant and the people. They marched forward—around and around the city. When the trumpets blew, God shook the walls of Jericho and they turned to rubble. In part, this was made possible through the actions of one woman who feared God and decided that serving him was in her best interest and in the best interest of her family.

By doing what she did, it seems that she was given a place in the line of David and the lineage of Jesus. She and her family were saved—not because she was a prostitute.

According to the book of James, they were saved because of her willingness to accept and to serve God and prove her faith by putting it into action.

Rahab was low on the social totem pole and she was most likely rejected by many in her city. After all, she was an innkeeper and/or a prostitute. As I mentioned, she did have some positive attributes but, she was not a stellar candidate for becoming a hero of the faith. And yet she was.

Peter failed over and over. He tempted Jesus to stray from his path to the cross. He failed to stand up for Jesus during his worst hour. And, of course, he sunk instead of walking on the water. But he also had some positive traits. In spite of the denial, Peter had always been a faithful and loyal follower and friend of Jesus. He was strong of back and of spirit. The day would come that he would stand strong for the faith and become a powerful leader in the Christian faith.

If you look at Joseph's life, it is pretty clear that he started out proud and haughty and mean-spirited. It is also clear that he was intelligent and that he was wise in many ways. God took what was good and shaped it into something that his brothers didn't even recognize—a man of power and influence and also a man of grace and forgiveness. So much so that when he confronted them for what they had done, he said, “you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good...”

Steel is heavier than water and it sinks if you toss it in. Yet in the right hands it is also strong and it is resilient and it holds its shape and it can be welded together into a solid piece. Making a vessel that floats and carries people—and where I lived—is used as a tool to feed people and to make a living.

In each case, it is not what these were that matters. It is what they became—what God shaped them into—that really matters.

Today, God cares for us. He is interested in you and in me. Not because we are worthy. Not because of who and what we are. He is interested in how he can mold and shape us into heroes of the faith. He doesn't care about what we were or even what we are. He cares about what we can become.