

Grace for the Sinner

Grace in Jesus' Genealogy

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Hey, do you have anybody in your life who really likes surprises? You have anybody like that? It just can't be a birthday party, it has to be a surprise birthday party. It can't be an anniversary, no, it has to be a surprise anniversary. Do you know anybody like that? Most of us would probably say, "Yeah, and I find them just a bit irritating because it gets old having to put that little hat on and hiding behind the couch and waiting until the person comes in and yelling surprise. Yeah, I know somebody just like that." But look, admit it, when you are actually able to surprise somebody, really, you like that, don't you? And when somebody surprises you, don't you like that as well?

Christmas is a time for surprises, isn't it? I think back to when I was just a little guy, waking up on Christmas morning and it was still a little bit dark out and I walked into the living room of our house and there was a brand-new gold Schwinn stingray bike. Wow, surprise, surprise, surprise for little Stevie, huh? And I have no idea where my parents kept that bike until that morning or how it was that they got that for me but what a great Christmas surprise. Later my father, a hard working man for sure, but once a year for a week he and his buddies would go up to Canada fishing. When I got to be about 10 years old, they started taking me with them which the older I've gotten, the more amazed I was that for the week he had to be with his buddies, he wanted his son to be at his side, and his friends, they just adopted me in the group. Just amazing how meaningful that was to me. But when I graduated from high school, one of those men sent me a hand tied fishing rod that was designed just for me. It even had my name on it. And then my dad purchased a matching fishing reel to go along with that rod. I had no idea that they were going to do anything like that for me. It totally surprised me. You know, it's been almost 40 years ago now, almost, and I still have it. I still have it. It's in my garage and any time I happen to be doing anything else in the garage and I look at that, it reminds me of that incredible expression of grace, that incredible expression of love for me in part because of the nature of the surprise.

Now, let me ask you this: does God, does he ever surprise people? In fact, could we say it this way: does God like surprises? For example, when you're reading in the Bible, is every page, "Well, that's what I would have expected God to do or is it surprise, surprise, surprise?" How about the way God chooses to work in your life? Is it always, "I expected that, expected that, expected that or is it man, I had no idea that God was doing that?"

Well, you know the answer. I think you could make the case biblically that God actually delights in revealing aspects of his character that we would have never predicted, we would have never expected. He delights in surprising people and oftentimes there are significant lessons that can be learned by studying such occasions

Well, that was especially true at Christmas time, wasn't it? The God who delights in surprising his people did so at practically every turn in the way he allowed his Son to be born, and that's so true. It even occurred in something as dry and normally as predictable as a genealogy. A genealogy.

With that in mind, please open your Bible now to two passages of Scripture. Can you do that? Matthew 1 and Joshua 1. You say, "Man, Pastor Viars, you're laying it on us. You asked us to pray for Faith West, listen to the sermon, now two passages, seriously? Yeah, we can do that." Matthew 1 and if you need that Bible under the chair in front of you, that's on page 1 of the back section of the New Testament so that's where you'll find Matthew 1, then back up to Joshua 1, that's on page 161 of the front section. So a lot going on here this morning. Matthew 1 or page 1 of the back section in the New Testament. Joshua 1, page 161 of the front section. Have we got all that?

This month we're studying grace in the genealogy of Christ and that's a culmination of a theme that we've been studying all year, "Finding Grace." And while this is a principle that we see throughout the Scripture and I thoroughly enjoyed my part in leading us in this, by the way, this year, but it's especially found in the Christmas story.

Now, Matthew 1, let's start there. Matthew 1 is a genealogy or the birth line of Christ. Now, as is true in any ancient genealogy, it's not a complete family tree, so to speak, so that there are selected people from selected generations and because Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience, he's proclaiming Christ as the King, the promised Messiah. He traces Jesus' lineage all the way back to King David and ultimately even to father Abraham. As I said, these are just selected generations so you would expect to have highlighted the relatives who were famous and who were wealthy and who were influential, the beautiful people, and you would also expect that some ancestors, they were kind of embarrassing. While the genealogy doesn't have to include every generation, you would expect them to be ignored. The skeletons in the family closet don't make it to the royal genealogy. That's not what Matthew gives us at all in this text.

Yes, Jesus is a King, but apparently he's a very unusual one. For example, his genealogy contains the names of five women. That in and of itself would not have normally been the case in their culture and as you learned last week with Pastor Green, the first one was Tamar. That will take your breath away if you know your Bible. Tamar along with her sons Perez and Zerah. And without going over all the details again, that story was about as scandalous as it gets and the lesson was God has grace for the oppressed. Tamar was ostracized by her father-in-law, Judah, and God mentions her in the line of Christ anyway.

Now, let's study the next woman who is mentioned in the line of Christ. Let's start in Matthew 1:1, "The record of the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." And try to put yourself in the shoes of a Jewish individual whom Matthew is trying to explain the beauty of Jesus. So this genealogy, verse 2, "Abraham," that would have gotten their attention, "was the father of Isaac. Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar." Oh, you've got to bring that up, Matthew? You studied that last week. "Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab." Oh my, the father of Boaz by Rahab. Now, if you're new to studying the Bible you might say, "Rahab, who was Rahab?" What's the answer to that question, my friends, right here in the church house? Yeah, Rahab was a prostitute. We're talking this morning about how God has grace for the sinner. Not the kind of grace that says, "Okay, you can come to Christ and sit in the back." The kind of grace that says, "You can come to me by faith and you might make it in the line of Christ."

Now, please turn back to Joshua 1 for the back story of all of that. Grace for the sinner this morning. Joshua 1, beginning in verse 1, now, you're going to have to work hard contextually here, okay? So this isn't time to be planning your Christmas shopping list or thinking about who won the games yesterday and all that sort of thing. This is the time to study the word. Are you on that? Can I get an okay? Okay, so let's get on it.

"Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel." Let me just stop right there and do a little bit of history because I realize that some of you are brand-new to studying the Bible and, boy, are we glad you're here. I recognize we are going to have a number of men and women this is their first Christmas studying the Bible and the Christmas story as followers of Jesus Christ. Are you pretty happy about that? Our church has had a fabulous year of men and women becoming Christians and men and women joining our church. A whole group of folks coming tonight for that. Wow, and so if you're here don't say, "I'm kind of impositioned because they've got to give out the page numbers and they've got to give me all the background." No, no, no, we are glad you're here and we're happy to review all of this history just to be absolutely sure that you're up to speed on exactly what it is that we're talking about.

I just read the first two verses of Joshua 1 and if nothing else, you probably recognize the name of Moses, right? Most people know him. Charlton Heston. Most people know him leading the, sorry, leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, parting the Red Sea, receiving the 10 Commandments. That would have occurred about 38 or 39 years prior to, remember this historically, the verses that we just read.

Did Moses, here's your question: did Moses lead that group of persons immediately into the Promised Land? No. Why? Well, because of the sin of unbelief on the part of whom?

Well, especially the 10 spies. Do you remember that story? 38, 39 years before what we just read, Moses had sent how many spies into the Promised Land? 12 into the Promised Land to do some advanced reconnaissance work, you might say. If you study your Bible, how many of the names of those 12 spies do you remember? Two. Who are they? Caleb and Joshua. But why do you remember their names? Because they were the men of faith. They were the ones who said, "Saddle up your horses, God will keep his promise and we need to do this." So Caleb and Joshua, again 39 years before what we're reading today, they said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of the land. We will surely overcome it."

But what about the other 10 spies who were sent out with them? They looked at the same facts and here's what they said. The men who had gone up with them said, "We're not able to go up against the people for they are too strong for us." What, the God who just orchestrated the plagues in Israel is not strong? What, the God who just parted the Red Sea is not strong? What, the God who just gave you the 10 Commandments? "They are too strong for us." So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out saying, "The land through which we have gone in spying it out, it's a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size." Then they went on to say this, "There also we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, the giants, "and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Now, the people who heard that report, you've got two guys saying, "Let's trust God." You've got 10 guys who are wimping out big time and all the people then of Israel in that day had to decide who they were going to believe. Well, who do they believe? Here's some sad verses, "Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night." Seriously? "All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron." That's often what happens. "We're not going to trust God so let's fuss at the leaders." "And the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt!'" There's a great plan right there. "'Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'"

Well, that wasn't so good, huh? By the way, were there any consequences for that unbelief? Yeah, there were consequences. What were they? Every adult, the Bible says, over 20 years old who made that choice other than Caleb and Joshua had to die in the wilderness. That's right, they weren't allowed to enter into the Promise Land so for the next 39 to 40 years, the children of Israel are on what amounts to an extended funeral march because of their unbelief.

Well now, now it's round two. Moses has died. It's time for one of his two faithful spies to take the lead, his name is Joshua. That's where we are. Look at verse 3, "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be

your territory. No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you." Is it fair to say that God is making some very clear, specific promises to his son, Joshua?

Now, look at the next verses and see if there's any repetitive themes. Verse 6, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Do you think God wants Joshua to be strong and courageous? Do you think he wants him to follow his word? Yeah.

Verse 10, "Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 'Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, "Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in," here's a promise, "to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it.'" To the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, "The LORD your God gives you rest and will give you this land." Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them, until the LORD gives your brothers rest, as He gives you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land, and possess that which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise." Listen to this, "They answered Joshua, saying, 'All that you have commanded us we will do,'" unlike 38 years ago with our parents. "They answered Joshua saying, 'All that you have commanded us we will do and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you; only may the LORD your God be with you as He was with Moses. Anyone who rebels against your command and does not obey your words in all that you command him, shall be put to death; only be," what? "Only be strong and courageous."

Everything sounds right, huh? They are finally back on track until you read the next verse, "Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies," oh no, "secretly from Shittim, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.'" Not the spy thing again? We already did the spy thing, I've seen that movie. It's a bad movie. I don't want to see the spy movie again.

Now, I want to read what happens next because, remember, the people in Matthew's day would have had this background when they received the shocking news that Rahab was in the line of Christ, but here's what I want to ask you to do as we read this next section of Scripture: be thinking about this from the perspective of Rahab. What if you were

Rahab? Then, think about it from the perspective of what if you were one of these two spies? Then think about it from the perspective of what if you were Joshua?

Here we go, Joshua 2:2, "It was told the king of Jericho, saying, 'Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight.'" I'm sorry, I missed a little detail. Go back to verse 1 for a minute, halfway through it, "So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. It was told the king of Jericho, saying, 'Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.' And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, 'Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.' But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, 'Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.' But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof." In other words, she chose to believe God. That's what that's all about.

"So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate. Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, 'I know that the LORD has given you the land.'" Did you hear that? That's a whole lot better than those spies 39 years ago. "And that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD 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," etc. "When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for," Jehovah, "for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven." Do you hear that? That's faith. "Above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the Jehovah, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.' So the men said to her, 'Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.' Then she let them down by a rope." Are you picturing this? You've got a harlot letting the spies down by a rope, "through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. She said to them, 'Go to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days,'" Joshua is going to love that part of it. "Then afterward you may go on your way.' The men said to her, 'We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father's household. It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear.' She said, 'According to your words, so be it.' So she sent them away, and they departed; and she

tied the scarlet cord in the window. They departed and came to the hill country, and remained there for three days until the pursuers returned. Now the pursuers had sought them all along the road, but had not found them. Then the two men returned and came down from the hill country and crossed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they related to him all that had happened to them. They said to Joshua, 'Surely," Jehovah, "the LORD has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us.'"

Now, I realize that's a lot of Scripture, but that's okay. That's okay. That's the context that Matthew's readers would have had when they heard that the coming Messiah was going to have as one of his ancestors Rahab the harlot. Rahab the harlot. In the time we have left, let's think about these events, looking for three Christmas surprises from Rahab's inclusion in the line of Christ.

The first one is Rahab's surprise. There's a place in the plan and program of God for you. I want to ask you for the next couple of minutes just to think about all these events through the grid of how it would have impacted Rahab. The people in the city had already heard of God; they had to decide what they were going to do with the information, but there's no question what this prostitute did, right? You saw it in the text, she believed. Her testimony was crystal clear but where does that leave her? I mean, she and her family are about to be conquered. She was a prostitute. They had heard about the Red Sea, they had heard about the 10 Commandments, they had heard about the holiness of God, so you're in that position just ready to be conquered and all of a sudden you hear a knock on your door and who is it that's there? Two Jewish spies. Surprise, surprise, surprise.

Do you think God might be trying to make a point then and now? Here's what it is I think, friends: nobody is beyond God's reach of redemption. And you know, that's what Matthew's readers really needed to hear, huh? By the time that Jesus came to the world, the religious leaders, the Pharisees had come up with all kinds of laws intended to elevate their own self-righteousness and distance themselves from those other people who didn't measure up. That's why many of Jesus' most fierce discussions involved the Pharisees where he said things like this, Matthew 21:31, "Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you." That's right, Jesus said that. That's because Christ's kingdom is not about perfect people earning their own way to heaven. Surprise, surprise, surprise, huh? That is the surprise of the Gospel. We would have assumed we have to earn it. We would have assumed we have to work for it. We would have assumed that a whole lot of people could have never attained it and maybe even in our quietest moments, we would have said we're probably not going to make the cut either. Then there's Rahab which means there's a place for everybody.

You know, that message comes through in so many aspects of the Christmas story. The angels make the announcement to whom? To the beautiful people? No, to the shepherds, just common laborers. Jesus is born in, at the Hiatt Regency in the biggest city and town, huh? No, "O little town of," do you want me to break out into song? No, "O little town of Bethlehem." He's born in a manger. So many of the details just scream common,

ordinary. There is a place for you. So what is the message to the Rahabs? We'll undoubtedly have people in our services today who have concluded in their heart, "There's no hope for me. I mean, somebody drug me to church today or I stumbled in here myself but I'm far too gone. I'm too far gone. My past is too checkered." Well, friends, here's something you've probably not heard somebody say to you very often, "Take a lesson from the genealogy of Christ." When is the last time somebody said that to you? Take a lesson from the genealogy of Christ. If there's a place for Rahab, what? There's a place for you.

Now, you might say, "What do I need to do." Well, the answer is the exact same thing that Rahab did in her day: make a decision of faith. One of the key verses in this text was when Rahab said, "For the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." Now, you might say, "By the way, hey, what about those lies she told, though?" Some people argue about that incessantly and really miss the point of the entire text but since some folks get wound about it, let me just answer that as quickly as I can: I believe during times of war it's okay to tell lies. I think sometimes you have to tell a lie in certain situations. For example, we used to have an FBI agent in this church and he used to do a ton of undercover work during the week and here's what he used to tell us, "If you happen to see me out around town during the week like having lunch or something with who appears to be some rather unsavory characters, it would probably be best if you would not come up and greet me as my pastor because that might get me or you killed. So I'm lying to them. I'm telling them that I want to buy drugs when the fact of the matter is I want to arrest drug dealers." Now, you can decide what you think about that. I was all for him doing that. All for him doing that whole thing. Please don't spend the rest of your time, "I'm going to have a theological argument. I'm going to send him an email." Don't worry about that. The point of the text, although I'm happy to get email. That might have sounded bad, but the point of the text is in Hebrews 11:31, "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient after she had welcomed the spies in peace."

And I just want to ask you this morning: are you sure there has been a definite time in your life where you have done individually what Rahab did individually, where you acknowledged your sin and you placed your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord? And friend, if you've never done it, maybe you didn't even know that the Gospel was this kind of a surprise. Maybe you're hearing that aspect of it for the first time, that it's a free gift by grace. I want to invite you right now to acknowledge your need and accept the free gift of salvation that is available in Christ. Make him your Savior and your Lord and I'll tell you right now, we are bathing these services in prayer. We are bathing the Christmas musical over at Faith West in prayer. The Living Nativity in prayer because just walk right on down through and here's what we're asking God, we are asking God to give us just a lion's share of men and women who will place their faith and trust in Christ at the end of this year. And if you're one of those persons, listen, it doesn't matter how many skeletons you have in your closet. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. If there's enough grace in God's heart for Rahab, there's enough grace in God's heart for you and we want to invite you because that's the kind of God you want to know, huh? That's the kind of God you want to live for. That's the kind of God you want to

serve. That's the kind of God who is powerful enough to get you to heaven and we would urge you to place your faith and trust in him today.

You might say, "Hey, if I come to Christ, can I still be a prostitute? Can I still use drugs? Can I still be hooked on pornography? Blah, blah, blah." No, no you can't. "So how do you know that from the text?" Well, it's interesting that genealogy in Matthew, it goes on to tell us that eventually Rahab became somebody's wife, a guy named Salmon. What does that mean? Because the Bible doesn't tell us that part of the story, but somehow she went from being a Gentile prostitute to a Jewish wife. But the good news is God will meet you wherever you are. The better news is he won't leave you there. He won't leave you there.

Now, what about the message to those called to receive repentant Rahabs? I think that many Christians in many churches would be very uncomfortable with this message. I really do believe that. God wants us to be havens of grace who are ready to welcome those who seek to become followers of Jesus Christ with open arms regardless of the baggage that they have in their hands. Do you agree with that? So our message to those who we are trying to reach is: if you're looking for a church home, we would love to have you here. Do you agree with that? You see, there is such a thing as faith involved in repenting and coming to Christ, there is also such a thing as faith involved in receiving those who will repent and come to Christ. And every one of us has to decide, "Do I contribute to a church climate that is welcoming and inviting to every person who walks in the door?" And I recognize, in fact this is one of the reasons I love being around here, there are a lot of people who not just with their words but with their actions say, "I want to be part of that team. I want to be part of seeing as many Rahabs come to Christ as possible because I'm no better than them compared to the holiness of Christ. So that person, if that person wants to know God, if that person wants to grow in Christ, there's always room for one more individual regardless of the skeletons. I don't care about the skeletons in their closet and I hope they don't really care about the skeletons in mine." We are welcome and open to persons who want to understand what it means to know God.

Now, let's change our perspective for a minute. What about how this would have affected the other people in the story? How about the spies? What was their surprise? Here's what it was: God will provide for you as you follow him. These guys had to be scared to death, huh, these two spies? They're going into enemy territory. In fact, the story illustrates just how dangerous this was because when the king of Jericho found out they were there, what did he want? What did he say to Rahab? "Bring those guys out." Why? Was he going to give them the key to the city? Just thank them? "I want to introduce you to the Welcome Wagon."

Obviously, very, very dangerous and then they had that thought in the back of their mind, I assume, how their previous generation had done on the spy gig. Right, think about it, as they were growing up, what are their parents who are about to die in the wilderness saying? "Anytime you have an opportunity to believe the promises of God, believe them. Act on them." In fact, you wonder if during the wilderness what it was like for the 10 unbelieving spies. Don't you believe when they would walk in the room, people would be

whispering, "Those are the ones. Those are the ones." Then you've got your little kids, "Don't be like those guys. Don't ever, if you're ever in this situation, don't be like this."

So you've got these two spies, they are sent out to do this task and you wonder like when Joshua said, "Hey, I want a couple of guys, a couple of volunteers to go over and spy on Jericho." It's like, "I don't think that's such a good idea." So now they're in that situation, they are undoubtedly scared and then they've got this history behind them of how the previous generation had done. Now the decision they have to make is whether they are going to take God at his word.

Let me ask you this: did God give those two spies all the details in advance? Did God say to them, "Here's the thing, you'll go to Jericho, there's a really nice harlot there. Her name is Rahab and she's become a Christian." In our terminology, "She's become a follower of Jehovah. She'll love you. She'll take you right in and then the king is going to come but she's going to protect you. She won't rat you out. She is worthy." Is there anything in the text like that? No, just, "Trust me. Trust me." You know, God delights in obedience, doesn't he? And he'll reward it and there's the key, in unexpected ways. You might say, "Why doesn't God give me the whole story in advance?" A. Because if we saw the whole story in advance we'd probably faint. That's why. I don't want to know the whole story, do you? No, just give me as much as you think I can handle right now, Lord. But isn't it also this: faith honors him? When a person says, "Listen, I don't have to know how it's all going to turn out, I just have to know you." That is an incredible act of worship. Do you live your life expectantly? "I'm just going to follow God, I'm just going to do what he wants me to do and I'll let him work out all the details."

For example, in your bulletin today you have a brochure about providing housing for the Biblical Counseling Training Conference in February. I just got back from Mexico. I had a great time. I had a great time in Mexico. If you prayed for me, thank you so much. Wow, the opportunities to serve God in that place are immense. They also taught me about, I've been on the three T diet that they taught me this week: tacos, tamales and tortas. So I've been having a great time. They call it down there vitamin T and I've been having just a great time with what God is doing there for sure. A bunch of those people down there, they want to come up here in February, seriously. They want to come up for the Biblical Counseling Conference. I said, "Do you own a coat?" That's the first thing I asked them. But a bunch of them want to come up because they want to get additional training in biblical counseling and community based outreach ministry. Here's the challenge: for many of them, that's an expensive trip. It's expensive to come here from Mexico, and so if we could aid them with housing, that would be marvelous. Marvelous. You say, "I don't know what that's going to be like." What do you think God wants you to do? Be like the two spies and say, "I don't have to have it all figured out. I'm just going to live expectantly and I'm going to trust God as I'm obeying him to work out the details." So don't just let a passage like this go by, that might be God telling you to get that form out and by faith provide something that he has entrusted to you, a bedroom, make it available to somebody else and see how he works it all out.

Now, here's the other side of that. Do this for a second, contrast Rahab to the ten faithless spies 38 years before and here's the lesson there: God will rebuke faithlessness and raise others up to get the job done. You see, those other ten spies 39 years before had a whole lot more training than Rahab ever did; a whole lot more experience than Rahab ever did. They had a whole lot more everything than Rahab did. But here's the lesson: you can either take what God has given you and aggressively seek to advance the ball or, and I know this sounds kind of harsh but it's true, God will put you on the sidelines and raise somebody else up to accomplish his will. Even if that person is not as gifted as you, doesn't have as much training as you, but if they're obedient, God will use them instead of you.

I've been in this pastor gig for a long time and I'm so thankful for people who have longtime faithfulness. They say, "Wherever I am at this point in my life, I want to be obedient. I want to live for God." I'm thankful that's the majority folks that call this church their home, but I'll tell you, every so often you get a person who starts getting it in their brain, "You know, I've been serving God for a long time and God is pretty lucky to have me. I'm kind of all that and a bag of chips. So with this next thing, well, God is just going to have to wait until I'm ready. God's going to have to have this done my way because, after all, I'm a pretty important person." No, no, no. Here's what God will do: he'll put you on the sidelines and he'll raise somebody else up. They may not have nearly the giftedness that you have. They may not have near the experience that you have and he'll take that person and leapfrog right over you and use that person to get the job done that he wants to accomplish because of that person's willing and sacrificial obedience. Now, think about it, those 10 spies had everything Rahab didn't and who was it that God used anyway? And the lesson is: let us never get to the place of thinking that we can serve God on our terms, in our way, because if it's not us then it's not going to get done by anybody.

Lastly, Joshua's surprise. Oh, poor Joshua. I wish, I don't know how it's going to work out in heaven but I hope there's some, "I need to ask you a few questions," time in heaven. Think about it from Joshua's perspective He sends these two spies out and the whole plan is go to Jericho but come back before the end of the day and then we'll get everybody together and we'll go conquer the land that God has promised. So it's getting dark, those guys don't show up. Then the next day they don't start showing up and I don't know if Joshua was a pacer, I would've been pacing about then, huh? How about you? Absolutely. "They're not here. They're not here. They're not here. Three days. Oh no, not the same spy mess we had 39 years ago." Then finally he sees them coming up over the hill and finally he gets them right by the nape of the neck, "Where have you been?" "We've been at a harlot's house," right? You're ready to give them one of these. And then they say, "And she's a believer in God and she saved our lives. She protected us." Can't you imagine a smile coming on Joshua's face. Surprise, surprise, surprise. I would've never expected God to have done that. He worked it out in his way, in his time, and I think Joshua would have said, "I'm so glad that I chose to be faithful even when I didn't know how it was all going to work out."

Hey, I don't know what God is calling you to right now. You might say, "I'm in a marriage and it's kind of tough." Listen, you don't have to know how it's all going to work out, you just have to choose to be God's kind of person and honor him anyway. Who knows how he'll surprise you, but he will. You might say, "You know, I've got a couple of teenagers right now and they're driving me totally nuts. Totally nuts. I want to stuff them in a barrel and nail the lid shut." Well, I know, God bless them. But do you know what you need to do? Don't give up. Don't give up. You just be a faithful parent and you say, "I don't know how it's all going to work out." You don't have to. You don't have to because our God delights in doing what? Listen, here's what: some of you had that friend who wanted to do a surprise party and you were so sick of them you chose not to go and then you saw on Facebook later they had a great time. Don't miss God's surprise party. Don't miss it when God is going to choose to surprise you next by not being there in your disobedience. You do what God wants you to do and then we'll trust him for the surprises.

Would you stand with me for prayer, please?

Father in heaven, what a delightful text. What a great story and, Lord, this too is just confirmation that this book in our hands, it's the word of God because no human would've come up with this. So, Lord, we praise you and we're so glad there was a place at the cross, so to speak, for Rahab because that means there is a place at the cross for us. And Lord, thank you that there is a place in your plan for Rahab which means there's a place in your plan for us. Father, we want to praise you for your grace and I pray that you would help each one of us to respond to that grace in the way that is appropriate given what is occurring in our hearts and lives. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.