

The story of Rahab

• *Rahab's story shows that this an issue for every Christian*

1. *Rahab's significance begins with her faith*

2. *Rahab's faith turned into practical action*

3. *Rahab's faith led her to being 'justified by works'*

Practicalities

1. *We start where we are*

2. *Don't put the giving of money first*

James brings this section of his letter to a close by moving from Abraham to Rahab^{□1} and then adding a final conclusion^{□2}. *'In the same way, was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she received the messengers, and sent them out by a different road^{□3}. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, just so faith apart from works is dead^{□4}.*

Why does he move from Abraham to Rahab? It is his way of showing that what he has said about Abraham applies to every Christian. 'Justification by works' is not just for one type of Christian. Abraham was a model Jew; Rahab was a converted gentile. Abraham was a man; Rahab was a woman. Abraham was a rich patriarch; Rahab was originally an immoral inn-keeper. Abraham was pivotal in the story of salvation; Rahab has but a minor place in the same story. Abraham took twenty-five years before he reached the pinnacle of his life; Rahab got to the pinnacle of her life very soon after her conversion. It all shows there is infinite variety in the story of the people of God but we all need to be a people who combine faith with bold actions.

1. **Rahab's significance begins with her faith.** She knew Yahweh, the God of Israel. 'I know that Yahweh has given you the land', she said. She knows and believes in a salvation that is 'by the blood of the lamb', and she wants to be rescued from God's anger against the Canaanites. Her story begins with faith.

2. **Rahab's faith turned into practical action.** She 'saved' the spies. 'Faith cannot save anyone, can it?' It can if it takes action! Rahab achieved fame and honour within the people of Israel, despite her past sinfulness and despite her past paganism. Her reward came not simply by believing but by turning her faith into practical action for some needy men whose lives were in danger. She was vindicated, despite her past, as a godly woman, by practical works of mercy towards the people of God.

3. **Rahab's faith led to her being 'justified by works'.** She was vindicated for her faith and highly honoured in the story of Israel. Of course the deed itself did not achieve her salvation! She already was a woman of faith accepted by God before she ever met the spies. She was not justified by works in Paul's sense of that language. But she was 'justified by works' in James' sense of the phrase.

But what are the practicalities of this matter? We must be involved in the lives of the needy, but how do we do it?

1. **We start where we are.** It is of little value being suddenly interested in needy people a thousand miles away from where we live. Indeed 'respectable backsliders' are often zealous about being missionaries to people thousands of miles away while they neglect needy people down the road! Somehow it makes us feel good to be compassionate to people a long way away! And if we visit them we become tourists, which is interesting but superficial! I doubt whether James would have been very enthusiastic about any half-missionary, half-tourist, kind of 'ministry'. We start where we are, otherwise our enthusiasm for the needy is dubious. God is likely to bring needy people before us, from down the road. 'Whatever your hand finds to do – whatever is right there in front of you – do it with your best energy ...' ^{□1}.

2. **Don't put the giving of money first.** If you become famous for giving money (as people from 'the west' normally are) you'll have problems! You will not know who are your friends and who are 'friends' for

□1 2:25

□2 2:26

□3 2:25

□4 2:26

□1 Ecclesiastes 9:10

their own reasons. Take your time. Put detailed knowledge of your friends' situation high on the agenda. Give the actual things that are needed not money (and not for re-sale!) If you are ministering to a place far away make sure you have some representative whom you can trust to be **living** (not visiting) in that area. Personally if I help anyone I like to know their brothers and sisters and friends. I like to have been in the home of the person I am helping – preferably for a few days, and preferably on many occasions. You find out all sorts of things if you become friends with the **communities** of whoever it is you feel you should help. If they want your help, but don't want you in their community, you are perhaps being tricked. If you visit an area as a Christian worker stay in local homes (not just in the home of the person who wants your help, and not in the homes of your own tribe or nationality). Love people from the top of your head as well as the bottom of your heart. Keep your eyes and ears open. Helping other people is not as easy as you might think.

3. *Some needs are more obviously genuine than others*

3. **Some needs are more obviously genuine than others.** A child who **actually** has dropped out of school, a person who **actually** is lacking clothes, a person who clearly is starving – these needs are more obvious. Rahab had no doubts about the need of the spies.

4. *Finance evangelism and preaching alongside practical action*

4. **Finance evangelism and preaching alongside practical action.** The Christian church is not only a social agency. Everyone welcomes 'aid' but we have some distinctive tasks to perform as well as giving 'aid', and the preaching of the gospel is high on the agenda.

James comes to his conclusion: *'For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, just so faith apart from works is dead'*¹. He speaks quite negatively about faith isolated from practical action. It is as useless as a dead body. What makes the body able to do anything for anyone else is that it is alive; it moves and acts because of the breath of life within it. In the same way what makes faith useful in the eyes of any other person is its liveliness, its activity, its breath of energy in doing what is needed for others.

5. *Better to make some mistakes than to do nothing*

5. **Better to make some mistakes than to do nothing.** 'Mercy-ministry' is not easy. It is full of traps and snares and a thousand confidence tricksters. Get involved with the needs of people. God will lead you and guide you. Maybe you will make mistakes, but he who never made a mistake never made anything!

¹ 2:26

¹ 1:1



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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