

Rahab's Scarlet Thread and the Love That Casts Out Fear

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Jericho — A Total Disaster and the One House That Stood

Joshua 6:20 records the walls of Jericho falling flat. There has never been a city that suffered a more total disaster. The wall was wide enough for people to build houses on it — it was a massive, substantial structure, the city's great confidence. And it fell all the way around in a single day. The soldiers walked straight in without having to find a gate. They killed every man, woman, child, ox, sheep, and donkey in the city on the same day the walls fell. One house survived: Rahab's, on the wall.

The people of Jericho were sinners. Not one particular kind of sinner — Rahab herself shows how sin compounds. She was a harlot. She was unwise. And on top of her other sins, when the king's men came looking for the two spies, she told a lie. That is how it is when people live without God: sin grows and multiplies. People think sometimes that they have only one kind of sin. The devil soon disabuses them of that. The real problem was not the wall or the army of Israel — the problem was their sins. And the world around us, whatever arrangements it makes to manage its circumstances, will not manage its sins away.

Rahab's Faith — Three Things in Order

Joshua 2:10–11 records what happened first in Rahab's history. Before the walls fell, before the terror, the first thing was that she heard. We have heard, she said, how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea, what He did to Sihon and Og on the other side of Jordan. The God of Israel is God in heaven above and in earth

beneath. That was the very first thing — she heard something. The whole city heard and was afraid. But that is not where it ends for Rahab.

Fear is not salvation. The whole city was afraid and their hearts melted. The whole city heard, and none of them were saved except Rahab. James 2:25 identifies what was different about her: was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she had received the messengers and had sent them out another way? She had faith. It was faith that caused her to do the works — hiding the spies and sending them out another way. The faith came first: she confessed the Lord, she acknowledged who God was. The works came after, as the expression and evidence of the faith. Faith without works is dead, which means faith always produces works; and it also means the works are not the root but the fruit.

And the third thing was the scarlet thread. She said, give me a true token — give me something that means something, that stands for something. And they told her to bind the line of scarlet thread in the window. That scarlet thread was a token, a symbol, of the precious blood of Christ. That is what saved Rahab the harlot. Not the wall's standing — indeed, her part of the wall was the only part that did not fall. Not her own courage or management. The scarlet token in her window.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear. — 1 John 4:18

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear — His, Not Ours

First John 4:18 says: there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. The perfect love that casts out fear is not our love when it has been made perfect in us. It is His love — perfect already, complete already, the love of God who is love. The people of Jericho were afraid, and their fear did not save them. Rahab heard of the God of Israel, believed, and the scarlet token in her window saved her household.

She is one of four women named in the genealogy of Matthew 1 — four women with dark histories whom God's grace reached and whose names stand in the line that led to the Lord Jesus. Rahab the harlot married, had a son, and her name is in the genealogy of Christ. That is what the scarlet thread does.

Song of Solomon 1 — First Love and the Love That Sustains

Song of Solomon 1 opens with the bride wholly occupied with her beloved's love, not her own: let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine. Wine speaks of earthly joys. She says: his love is better. She was taken up entirely with his love for her. That is first love — and first love is not something to be graduated from. The Lord had it against the assembly at Ephesus that they had left first love. But first love deepens; it does not diminish. What the Lord had against them was precisely that they had left what should have been growing.

Draw me, she says — we will run after thee. One heart drawn to the beloved draws others. If my heart is overflowing with His love it affects those around me; we will run after thee, not I will. And he brings her into his chamber — deeper acquaintance with himself, deeper knowledge of his ways. We will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine — not only better, but remembered. We need to keep it in remembrance. I am black but comely, she says. Black as the shepherd's smoke-darkened tents — that is what she is by nature, by the old man, the self. But comely to him. Solomon loves me. That is what sustained her soul through whatever persecution or affliction the daughters of Jerusalem brought. Not what she was in herself, but what she was to him. And so should it be for us: not what we are by nature, but what we are to our Lord, the beloved who loved us before we loved Him, whose perfect love has cast out fear, and whose love — deeper and fuller as we go on — is meant to be what fills and overflows our hearts in this last day when the enemy would so seek to distract us from His person.

