

Dumbfounding Grace

Her heart pounded loudly enough to be heard by the others in the room. Outside, the streets were filled with horrible screams – people were dying. The house she was in quivered and at times seemed like it would collapse; the neighboring homes were already in rubble.

Her hands shook uncontrollably, and the situation seemed completely unreal – as her mind considered her present condition, she was bombarded with images from her past – a sordid, dismal past. She was a whore and her livelihood was known by all.

Not only so, but the city she called home was so filled with vile practices that she knew it deserved every bit of the terrible judgment it was now receiving. Through the dusty air, she could make out the devastation and it was complete – every building, every life, gone.

Except hers! She knew without a doubt that she, as much if not more, deserved the same fate, yet here she was along with her family – huddled together – alive and unharmed.

Her brother who at first had scoffed when she warned him to take shelter from the attack in her home was now on his knees hugging his wife and children.

“Are you sure we’re safe?” he whispered trying not to alarm the children.

“Why would they spare you and us? You said their God abhors harlotry. How do we know they won’t just save us for last?” her father asked.

“What makes us different? Are we going to die too?!” queried her young nephew.

Suddenly, there was silence outside. Shortly thereafter, loud trumps from a ram’s horn sounded and the thousands of soldiers who had utterly destroyed her city began to depart.

Slowly, and with a shaky hand, she opened the door. In a moment, several men approached her. “Stay inside until we come for you!” they commanded. Remembering her promise to do just that, she closed the door and began to reassure her relatives.

What seemed a long, long time passed until a strong rap on the door was heard and three soldiers entered, fully armed.

“You may come out now,” said one of them, taking her by the hand and gently leading them all out of the devastated city. They’d not gone far when she gasped and said, “May I get something I forgot? Please?!”

The soldiers were quiet for a while and then assented, watching her carefully as she scrambled back to the only standing part of the once mighty wall. Running to the window which faced outward, she grabbed a large scarlet cord that she had hung there and made her way back to the escorts.

The story of Rahab speaks so very loudly to my own heart. Obviously, I’ve dramatized it (see Joshua 2), but here was a woman no one would have thought worthy of the mercy of God. She had no good works, no history of devotion.

As a matter of fact, her fame was a shameful one and her life a cruel testimony to the passion of the sinful human heart. Yet one thing stood between her and a horrible death – a scarlet cord.

You see, she lived in the fortified city of Jericho and her home was actually a part of the city’s wall. When the two Hebrew spies sent by Joshua needed a hiding place, she gave it to them. She was convinced that the God of these Jewish invaders was going to give them victory and thus asked for their protection. In response, the spies promised her the same if she hung a scarlet cord outside her window and remained in the house.

You know the story. The hosts of Israel marched around the city for seven days then shouted and blew their horns. At that, the walls of Jericho tumbled outward – all except Rahab’s portion. She and her family were saved by the scarlet cord.

But the story doesn’t stop there. As merciful as it was for her to be spared the fate of the rest of Jericho, she also received a marvelous gift – an awesome outpouring of grace. You see, she somehow became acquainted with a man by the name of Salmon (maybe the kind of guy who goes ‘against the current’!). He may have been one of the spies or a guard to Rahab and her family, but against ALL the odds, this man took her as his wife.

Think about it! God had commanded the Jews to annihilate virtually everything in the promised land – to absolutely clean house –

to ‘wipe the slate clean’. Moses had strictly admonished them, “...you shall destroy all the peoples who the LORD your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them...” (Deut 7:16). The mood was NOT one of tolerance if you catch my drift.

Yet, in spite of this, God put it in the heart of Salmon to go against the flow, to actually take her into his family – I mean this was without a doubt a huge leap of faith for him. Dumbfounding indeed.

But the story doesn’t stop there either. Rahab had a child by the name of Boaz who had a child by the name of Obed who had a child by the name of Jesse who had a child by the name of David – as in king David. Yes, Rahab was actually the great, great grandmother of the great king and sweet psalmist of Israel!

But the story doesn’t stop there either. You see, this genealogy also put her in the Messianic line as well! Jesus Christ was a descendant of David, and thus, of Rahab – whoa! This is a story of mercy followed by grace after grace after grace... Why? Simply a scarlet cord? Could all this be bestowed upon her because of a scarlet cord?! Can I get me a couple hundred yards of it somewhere??

Dear friend, here’s a foundational principle many of us need to be reminded of frequently – and I’m one of them. This may surprise you, but... well... I’m not any better than Rahab. (Steady Mom, you want to sit down? Need a glass of water?) And neither are you! Oh,

you may not have consciously brought to the Lord a Samsonite full of what YOU think is terribly gross Rahab-like sin when you asked Christ to be your Savior; then again, maybe so. In either event, as you grow in the Lord and endeavor to walk more closely to Him, you'll realize to a greater and greater degree that Rahab should have been 'your middle name'.

And you will thereby cling more tightly than ever to that glorious scarlet cord. Why? Because of what it represents – the blood of our spotless Lamb, Jesus, Who constantly prays for us and justifies us to the Father. He covers us over and over and over and over ... (imagine a LOT of 'overs') in grace.

In fact, if you consider that in Revelation, each gate of the heavenly city is described as being one pearl and you know that the wall of the city is recorded as 144 cubits or about 216 feet. Plus, you consider that one thin coat of the nacre of the pearl is about 0.35mm or about 0.1378 inches. Well, then

each pearly gate could have over 18,000 coats of 'grace and beauty' around that initial piece of underlying grit. Now DON'T start counting your sins! It's a PICTURE!

The point is, when we fail at the gate of our lives so to speak, when we make poor choices, bad judgments, let the wrong influences in, etc. (which we all do quite often), God is gracious to us over and over and over and... not because we deserve it, not at all. It's the scarlet cord you see – for the scarlet cord is all He sees. He has chosen to see only the Blood of Christ covering you from the moment you believe and accept His free gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

So don't forget that cord! Don't leave it behind. Don't start thinking of your own good works or noble attempts at greater purity or personal holiness as substitutes for it – those are responses, not replacements! Nothing replaces that 'cord'. Nothing substitutes for the Blood of Jesus Christ. Nothing.