

## The Sure Sign

*Joshua 2:8-21*

**W**hen I was a teenager, a friend and I were witnessing for Christ one day on a beach in Pensacola, Florida. We encountered some who were interested, some who were indifferent, and some who were antagonistic toward the message of Christ. However, there is one person who stands out in my memory of that day more than any other. When we asked him if he was a Christian, an expression of surprise came immediately to his face. He replied, “Of course, I am! I’m an American, aren’t I?” Then he turned and continued walking down the beach.

Well, he may have been an American, but that fact did nothing to save him from the penalty of sin. He may have had good intentions, and may have honestly thought that his American citizenship would give him salvation, but those good intentions and honest thoughts would not save him, either. When everything has been said, he was trusting in the wrong thing. Let me ask you this morning: in what are **you** trusting for your salvation?

Last week, we examined the conquering faith of two individuals in the second chapter of Joshua. We looked at the conquering faith of the man Joshua, and the woman Rahab, and we saw how a conquering faith operates in three tenses: (1) by being practical in the present; (2) by remembering the past; and (3) by preparing to advance into the future. And even though these two people at the time had never met each other, their conquering faith was expressed in the same way in both their lives.

Today, we focus on the request Rahab made of the spies. She said to them, “*Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death*” (vv. 12b-13). Rahab had heard the stories of how the armies of Israel had conquered two kings in the land of Moab, and she believed in her heart that the God of the Hebrews was a powerful God who had already given them the land of Canaan. She knew that the days of Jericho were numbered.

So, because she had shown the spies kindness by essentially saving their lives, she is asking for a guarantee that they will return the favor, and show kindness to her and her family. She said, “*Give me a sure sign,*” or in the King James Version, *Give me a true token*. So the spies told her in verses 17-18 that they would

guarantee her safety if she would tie a scarlet rope from the window, where it could be seen from the outside.

Perhaps that is the request that arises from deep within *you* today: “Give me a sure sign that I will be saved from my sin and from an eternity without Christ in hell!” Well, God has already given us a “true token,” or a “sure sign.” What is it?

## **1 The Sure Sign is not personal merit or goodness**

We have already seen that Rahab was a prostitute. As we mentioned last week, some have tampered with the Word of God and tried to say that she was merely an innkeeper. But over and over in the Scriptures, whenever Rahab is mentioned, she is nearly always called a harlot, or a prostitute. The Scriptures do not gloss over anything, not even the sins of the most prominent characters. Even though Rahab was to eventually become the ancestress of King David, and Jesus Himself, she is still called “the prostitute Rahab” in the book of Hebrews. It is almost as though God did not want us to ever forget that she had been a prostitute.

So she could not say to the spies, “Look how good I am!” She may have been a much respected citizen of Jericho, given what we know about their ancient culture and the way they worshipped their own gods. But somehow she knew she was out of place when talking about the Lord God of Israel. Somehow her profession just would not fit into the scheme of things when Jericho had been conquered by the armies of Israel. Somehow, her faith had begun to bud. Somehow, she knew that she could not depend on her personal merit or her goodness to save her from death.

If you are depending this morning on your own personal goodness, you are depending on the wrong thing. If you are depending on your reputation as a citizen of this town or this state or this country, then you are depending on the wrong things. If you are depending on your accomplishments and recognitions as your sure sign, then you are depending on the wrong things. None of us can count on those things, because they could all change overnight. If they did, then where would we be? For our salvation, as a sure sign, we must depend on something more lasting and enduring.

But the most convincing reason we have that we cannot depend on our personal merit or goodness is that every one of us has been contaminated by sin. This fact is proven to us over and over again in the arena of our lives, as well as in the Scriptures:

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isaiah 64:6)*

*Everyone has turned away, they have altogether become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 53:3)*

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)*

No matter how important you are in the eyes of other people, and no matter how basically good you are deep in your heart, somewhere buried in amongst all the achievements and awards and recognitions is that cursed characteristic common to all members of the human race: sin. So the sure sign of our salvation is definitely not personal merit or goodness.

## **2 The Sure Sign is not fear of God**

Rahab's remarks to the spies were quite revealing. She told them just what they wanted to hear. She said to them in verse nine, *"I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you."* She told them that when they had heard of how the Israelites had conquered the two kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, that their *"hearts sank and everyone's courage failed"* because of the Israelites, *"for the Lord"* their *"God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."*

She mentioned those two kings for a very important reason. These two men, Sihon and Og, were giants who had ruled the land just on the other side of the Jordan River from Jericho. For the Israelites to have conquered them in battle would be like one of our local high school football teams humiliating the Super Bowl champions in a football game. Basically, Rahab was saying, "If your God can do that for you, then we don't stand a chance."

They were afraid. Even though the inhabitants of the city of Jericho were protected by a high, thick wall, they were still afraid. They had heard the accounts of how the God of the Israelites had sent ten plagues on the people of Egypt, until Pharaoh had agreed to let the people go. They had heard how God had parted the waters of the Red Sea some forty years before. They had heard how God had given His people water from the rock and food in the wilderness for those forty years. And they knew they didn't stand a chance before Him. They were afraid!

But that basic fear of God would not save them. Rahab realized that. Even though she was probably just as fearful as anyone else, she realized that fear alone would not protect her or her family. That was why she asked for the sure sign from the spies that they would be spared.

Fear has never been enough. It will never be enough. Adam and Eve discovered that from the very beginning. After they had sinned, and knew they had sinned, they tried to cover themselves. But it didn't work, and this is what we read in Genesis:

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Genesis 3:8-10, emphasis added).*

Isaiah the prophet spoke concerning the coming Day of the Lord, and he said that *"men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth"* (Isaiah 2:19). Fear of God is not going to be enough on the Day of Judgment!

You may have a very healthy fear of God today. It is right for us to approach God with a reverential fear that leads us to worship Him in the beauty of His holiness. But fear alone did not save the inhabitants of Jericho. It would not have saved Rahab. It will not save you. Simply being afraid of punishment for sin will not save you.

**3 The Sure Sign is not head knowledge.**  
The people Jericho had head knowledge. They knew the facts and figures. They were acquainted very well with how the Lord God had acted on behalf of His people. There may have been a lot of rumors flying around the streets of Jericho as to the might and power of the Lord God of the Hebrews. But even with the most accurate facts and information available to them, they were not saved from destruction.

Rahab had the same information and facts everyone else did. Because of her occupation, she may have had access to more information than the ordinary person would have. But just knowing the facts would not have saved her. She knew that. Rahab had unknowingly uncovered a truth that many people today have not yet realized: that mere head knowledge of the facts and truth does not save anyone.

That is what James was trying to get across when he wrote his letter. He pointed out: “*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder*” (James 2:19). He was saying that the demons have access to much spiritual knowledge. They know better than we do how powerful God is, and they are richly acquainted with the ways God works in the lives of us human beings. Yet even with all that head knowledge and access to the right information and facts, the demons are still condemned. They believe the right things, but their only response is to shudder and tremble.

You have all the right facts at your fingertips. You may be able to quote the Scriptures fluently. You may know all a person would need to know about Christ. But that head knowledge alone will not save you. Suppose you were to receive a blow to the head which gave you amnesia? Suppose the arteries in your body harden so that you cannot remember important things? Could you depend upon your head knowledge then? No, you could not. You would have to depend on something more lasting, more secure.

## **4 The Sure Sign is the Blood of Christ!**

It was no accident or mere coincidence that the sure sign the spies gave to Rahab was a *scarlet* rope. It could have been any color, but it wasn't! That scarlet-colored rope was a vivid picture of the salvation God offers us in Christ. Only Rahab's unhesitating faith in the “sure sign” of the scarlet rope saved her from the invading Israelite army. Only our unhesitating faith in the blood of Christ as our “scarlet rope” can save us from the penalty and punishment of sin which we all deserve.

The writer of Hebrews pointed out the superiority of Christ over the old system of sacrifices. He wrote,

*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. **How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*** (Hebrews 9:13-14, emphasis added).

In his first letter, Peter was talking about the sure sign of our salvation:

*“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from*

*your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19, emphasis added).*

In John’s first letter, he told his readers that the sure sign is the blood of Christ:  
*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).*

John’s *Revelation* uncovered the same truth, that this sure sign is nothing but the blood of Christ:

*All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:11-14).*

Now go back to the book of Joshua, and notice three things about the sure sign of the scarlet rope which are also true of the sure sign of the blood of Christ.

***First, the blood of Christ is available to all who trust in it for salvation.*** It was a very simple thing to tie a scarlet rope in the window. Receiving the sure sign of Jesus is so simple that many stumble over it. Yet because it is so simple, it is available to everyone. Romans 10:13 tells us, “*For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*” We read in 2 Peter 3:9b, “*He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” The blood of Christ is available to every person who places his faith and trust in it. It is available to you today.

***Second, the blood of Christ identifies us with Christ.*** The only way the invading army of Israel would know where Rahab lived was by the sign of the scarlet cord hanging from her window. They were to leave her and her family alone. It identified her living quarters. If you have believed on the name of the Son of God, and if you have placed your trust in the blood of Christ as the sure sign of your salvation, it ***identifies*** you as belonging to Christ. Just as the blood of the lamb on the doorpost identified the homes of the Hebrews in Egypt on the night of the first Passover, so the blood of Christ identifies us today. Note the condition set forth by



the spies in Joshua 2:19: only those who were inside Rahab's house when the attack came would be spared. Only those found "in Christ" can be saved.

*Third, the blood of Christ qualifies us to enter heaven.* There is no other qualification. Joshua 6:25 reads, "But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day" (emphasis added). The scarlet cord in the window was the qualification for her to be accepted as one of them. We read in Ephesians that "In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Ephesians 1:7-8, emphasis added).

My dad used to say that the pecan trees always bloomed after the last frost. He would say that when you saw the little buds on the pecan trees, that was a sure sign that Spring had finally arrived. Every one of us needs a "sure sign" that we have received eternal life. It is not personal merit or goodness. It is not fear of God. It is not mere head knowledge. It is nothing less than the blood of Christ.

That man on the beach in Pensacola, Florida, did not have a sure sign. He didn't really understand what being a Christian really involves. But there may be many here this morning who do not understand any better than he did. Are you depending on anything other than the blood of Christ for your salvation? If you are, then you especially need a sure sign today.

Have you tied a scarlet rope in the windows of your soul?