

New Beginnings

December 31, 2017 Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

2017 will be history after today. The year has drawn to a close and it is time to reflect on what we accomplished this past year. Have you grown in your knowledge and wisdom of God or has it been a year of procrastination that someday you will get around to learning more about the Jesus that we just celebrated a birthday for a week ago. Were you excited for the right reasons for the season, or was it more about outdoing the neighbors with lights, ornaments, and jolly Saint Nick and his reindeer blown up characters decorating your lawn? Perhaps it was the attitude of “Let’s get on with the show, open up these presents and eat enough food for two people.” Jesus and the Bible story of his birth didn’t even get mentioned. The party went on without a mention of the honored guest.

Today I want to talk about the effect that our heavenly Father had on a Bible character in the Bible that changed a life completely. God has not changed and even today He is the Light of the world and he is still changing lives for those who believe and trust in him. This world has nothing lasting to offer to change a heart, to take away guilty memories of the past, to wipe away sins and cleanse a soul. There is nothing in this world that gives peace, love, joy and goodwill towards men. That was the promise tidings of great joy that the angels proclaimed at Jesus’ birth. “Peace on earth, goodwill towards men.” Jesus represents love that heals the broken hearted, sets captives free, delivers people from the bondage of guilt, shame, and addictions. Look at Luke 4:17. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, after he had defeated the devil’s temptations in the wilderness following his baptism in the River Jordon by his cousin, John the Baptist, he returned to Nazareth where he was born filled with the Spirit of God. He entered the synagogue as was the custom on the Sabbath day and he stood to read. The book of Isaiah was handed to him and Jesus turned to Isaiah 61:1. The passage reads like this: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” Then he closed the book and gave it to the minister and sat down. All eyes of the people gathered in the synagogue were fastened upon him. He then spoke these words, “This day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears.” All who witnessed this wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they asked, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

The three and a half years that Jesus would minister to the people would go by quickly. There would be those who would never get beyond the fact that Jesus came from a poor family, his parents were common people and his father would always be known as a carpenter and his brothers and sisters would be among them. This would cause them to stumble and have doubts concerning his true identity of “God with us.” To others who needed healing and a new beginning, he would be the physician that would change their

lives forever and they would praise God and be grateful for the wonderful opportunity that had been extended to them to start life over again and not have to look back.

There were some of these people even in the Old Testament that God did these things for and that is what I want to share with you today. You may be burdened with the weight of memories from your past; you may be carrying the weight of guilt or shame for decisions that you made that cannot be corrected and they haunt you even while you smile and carry on your day to day duties, but at nighttime you cry. My prayer is that you will find peace by experiencing God's love in your life. His love is unconditional for his word says that "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." See Romans 5:8. We can never be righteous enough in our own power to become a redeemed child of God. No one is ever good enough, righteous enough, holy enough, or rich enough to buy their way into God's grace. We must come as humble little children and receive his gift of grace and mercy by faith and follow his directions, allowing him to take our hands and lead us into paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Read Psalms 23. Only then will we have goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The character that I want to share with you today is in the book of Joshua chapter 2. Her name is Rahab which means broad or large. At the beginning of this story two spies were sent out to check out the land of Jericho because Joshua planned to attack this region. The men entered and lodged at Rahab's house, a well-known harlot. The king received word that some men had come from Israel to search out the country and they were seen entering Rahab's house. The king then sent a messenger to Rahab to tell her that she needed to turn the men over to the king because they were going to prove to bring trouble to their country. The woman, in the meantime, hid the men and told the king's messenger that they had stopped by there, but they had left at dusk and if they hurried they should be able to overtake them. They left and searched for the men, but Rahab had hidden the men on the roof of her house among stalks of flax that she had laid out on her roof top. The king's search team pursued as far as Jordan and when they had not found the spies, the gate of the city was then closed.

That night, before the spies of Israel laid down to sleep, Rahab had a discussion with them. She told them of the stories she had heard of their God delivering their enemies over to them and she was sure that their God was going to deliver Jericho over to them also. The people of Jericho were trembling at the prospect of the battle that was sure to take place in the near future. She told them about how God had dried up the Red Sea for them when they came out of Egypt and how that God had helped the Israelites destroy the two kings, Sihon and Og, on the other side of Jordan.

She said that the citizens of Jericho lost courage when they heard these stories for God Almighty was certainly on their side. Rahab acknowledged that the LORD their God is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. She then asked them for a return for her kindness towards them in hiding them from the king's messengers. All she wanted was

mercy for her family to be safe in her house when they attacked and their lives spared. She had a father, mother, brothers, and sisters as well as all that they had. The men promised to do right by her and after they had promised to spare her family, she let them down by a red cord through the window over the wall where her house sat. She instructed them to get to the mountains, hide there for three days so the pursuers would not find them and then they would be safe to return home. . She, in turn, was told to put the red cord that had been used to allow them to escape, in the window, and the soldiers would recognize the sign when they entered the city. Anyone that was within her house would be saved alive; soldiers would not be held accountable for anyone who ventured outside of the house should harm come to them.

The men returned home safely following Rahab's instructions and the spies gave the report to Joshua that the LORD had delivered Jericho into their hands. If you follow this story, you will find that true to their word, the household of Rahab was saved and even more amazing is that Rahab married into the tribe of Judah and is listed in the lineage of Jesus Christ. You will find her name listed in Matthew chapter 1. There are only five women's names listed in the lineage of Jesus Christ and she is one of them. The family line begins with Jesus Christ came from the family of King David and also from the family of Abraham. And this is a list of his ancestors from Abraham to King David. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and his brothers. Judah's sons were Perez and Zerah, (their mother was Tamar), Hezron; Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz (his mother was Rahab).

Look at Romans 10:11-20. Here, Paul speaks concerning faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please the Lord. Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes from the Word of God. How can a person hear without a preacher and how can a person preach except they are sent? You will learn that when the Jews rejected Jesus, He reached out to Gentiles so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord can be saved.

Hebrews chapter 11, explains that faith is that which makes us sure of that which we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see. It was their faith that made the Patriarchs of the Old Testament pleasing to God. Our faith convinces us that the world was made by God's command. We also know that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen. Read down through these verses and you will get glimpses of why God approved of men like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Moses and his parents. When you reach verse 31, there is Rahab listed among those whom the Lord approved and blessed. Rahab had been a prostitute, but she had faith and welcomed the spies. So she wasn't killed with the people who were disobedient. Her life was changed and she no longer was used as an object for man's pleasure; she became a woman of God whose children were blessed by the LORD Almighty. Not only was she spared, but her whole family was spared with her.

This chapter is wonderful as it explains all the promises that God gave to all he was pleased because of faith. Not all experienced miracles for some died for their faith in

Jesus. Some received their dead loved ones back again; others were tortured for their faith, but would not recant their testimony of the power of God. They were sure that they would get a better reward when the dead are raised to life and they held on to that hope. Some were mocked and beaten with whips and some were chained in jail. Some were stoned to death and sawed in two or killed with swords. Some had nothing but sheep or goat skins to wear; they were poor, mistreated and tortured. The world didn't deserve them for they were good people who wandered in the deserts and on the mountains and had to live in caves and holes in the ground. All of them pleased God because of their faith! But still they died without being given what had been promised. This was because God had something better in store for us. And he didn't want them to reach the goal of their faith without us.

I find it amazing that many people ignore the Bible. What an amazing, wonderful book full of promises that God had stored away for us when he returns.

When I was a little girl, I sometimes stayed several days at a time with my grandparents who lived in Garland, Maine. My grandfather would head out for the mill where he worked in Dexter with a black metal dinner box under his arm as he left each morning. I would wonder during the day what he would bring home in that dinner pail. He always brought me home something and I would be so excited to find out what he had saved for me. I love the special treat Grampy brought every night and as soon as he came through the door, he opened that dinner pail and give me a treat that he had either bought or simply saved for me. Grammy would always smile and give me a hug as I enjoyed the sweet cake or candy that was passed to me. How much love was given to me from my grandparents. Look at Matthew 7:7-12. "Ask and you will receive, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you. Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And the door will be opened for everyone who knocks. Would any of you give your hungry child a stone if the child asked for some bread? Would you give your child a snake if the child asked for a fish? As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give good things to people who ask. Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about."

It continues by telling us to seek out the narrow gate that leads to eternal life. The broad way leads to destruction and many people go through that gate. But the gate to life is very narrow and is so hard to follow that only a few people find it. Proverbs 3:5. It says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. (Don't use and follow your own judgment). In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path. (Always let him lead you and he will clear the road for you to follow.) Respect the Lord and stay away from evil! Those who follow him will have great rewards in heaven.