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A Convert in Canaan

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Series: Taking Ground
Joshua 2

BIG IDEA – WE TAKE PERSONAL RISKS TO BRING CHRIST TO EVERY RELATIONSHIP

What's your favorite movie series? Not your favorite movie...that might be different...your favorite movie series. Some of you are old school. You're like, "I love *The Godfather* series." You love *Rambo*. You love *Rocky*. Two of you like *The Fast and the Furious* series. How many of those do we need, guys? If you're like my wife, she loves the Bourne trilogy. Do you remember those? I'm waiting for the new Christian one, "Bourne Again," starring Jim Caviezel and Kirk Cameron. I have a vision for it.

My kids love Harry Potter. They fight over which one to watch, number one or number seven or seven part one or seven part two, or the Avengers series, but come on. Let's just admit it. We know what the best movie series ever is: *Mission: Impossible*. Obviously. And not just because I have a man crush on Tom Cruise. I know he's a Scientologist. Not *that* part. He does his own stunts.

Every *Mission: Impossible*... How does it start out? Whether you're sitting in the theater or you're watching on your TV, you're like, "Get ready, because this opening scene is going to be epic." Well, guys, in Joshua 2, it's an epic opening scene. It's a spy movie. What's interesting is if Joshua, chapter 1, is all about *inspiration*, Joshua, chapter 2, is all about *investigation*. Joshua, chapter 2, is the sending out of the spies.

The first thing God told Joshua to do in chapter 1 was "Be courageous," and the first thing Joshua does in chapter 2 is take a risk. I just want to tell you where we're headed today. I'm going to ask you to be a person who takes risks. Here's our hope for our church: Would you take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship? Would you and your family take personal risks (we'll talk about what that means) to bring Christ to every relationship? Because that's the way the gospel goes forward.

Here, I'll show you this. Let's start out the story. Turn with me to Joshua, chapter 2, verse 1. "**And Joshua the son of Nun...**" Whenever they use his full name, they're usually starting a new story. If they just say, "Joshua," we're normally in the middle of a story. If they use his full name, they're starting or ending a story.

Look at this. "**...sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies...**" I know what you're thinking. "That sounds like a dumpy place." You're like, "That's a place you want to get out of. Absolutely. That sounds like the wilderness." He sends these spies. Here's the whole thing. We don't even get their names.

There's some urban legend. There's some Jewish tradition. Some people think one of the spies is Caleb, that Joshua honors Caleb, his good friend from the past, and says, "You went last time. You're going to go again." We don't know. In fact, I think the point of the story is Joshua is not the main character. He *is* the main character, outside of God, in almost every chapter of Joshua except *this* one.

Even the spies... It would be great to get their names. We got all of the names of the spies last time. Why don't we get their names *this* time? Because this story is actually more about Rahab than it is about the spies. There are two types of risks you can take, and they're both shown in this chapter. That's why I believe this chapter is primarily here: to motivate us to take risks and that risk is one of the signs of true Christian faith.

Let me give you the two. There is the *going risk* and the *welcoming risk*. There was the risk of the spies, and there was the risk of Rahab. What is the *going risk*? It's the sending. It's the leaving. It's the "We need to go to new places to reach new people." This happens every time we send missionaries. This happens every time we plant a church. This happens every time you leave what is comfortable and convenient for what is uncomfortable, what is known for what is unknown.

Who tends to lead in the going risking in the church? Men. Historically, biblically, globally, men tend to lead in that. That gets a small part of the story. It's an important part of the story, but Rahab gets the bigger part of the story. Rahab is the *welcoming risk*. Who leads in all of the welcoming risk throughout all of church history? Women. The hospitable spirit, the "We could make room, and we should have them over," is the spirit of risk from a woman to say, "I'd like to welcome someone into my life."

I have not talked about this a lot, but my family recently, in the last year, got into the foster care system, and we are respite foster care parents. Do you think that was my idea? I mean, my youngest son just turned 6. Life was just about to get really easy, kind of. I don't need to constantly worry about my kids all the time, and then my wife said, "I have a heart to foster." I'm like, "Why?"

She said, "We have a big enough house. We could have another person." She said, "We could do it." She said, "Let's just start, and we'll just take the kids on the weekend." I'm like, "The weekends?" It's the spirit women have. It's that welcoming spirit. Have you ever talked to someone who adopts? We have many families in our church who adopt. I mean, real talk here. Honestly, adoption is scary for a lot of reasons.

First, if anybody is thinking about it, they're like, "Well, what happens when I welcome this person into my life? Do they have medical needs I won't know about? Did some trauma happen in their life that we're going to find out in five years? Are they going to hurt one of my kids? Are we going to mess up the birth order? What's going to happen?" This is a risk, but, guys, we have to risk.

Why do we risk? I'm going to root this theologically. I always want to talk in here... We could talk anywhere about risk. You could hear a TED Talk on risk. Let me root this theologically. Why do we risk? We risk because God can't. What is risk about? Risk is about two things: the future and not knowing it and the potential for loss.

So, when God sent Jesus Christ into the world, and he was going to suffer, be rejected, be betrayed, and be crucified, was that a risk? The answer is *no*, because God knows the future. It's not a risk. It's called a *sacrifice*. So, God knows the future. Listen. When you think about the future, do not think about the future apart from the grace of God. That's part of why people are anxious. They think about the future apart from the grace of God.

In going and welcoming you say, "God is good. I'm going to take a calculated risk, and I believe the best thing is going to happen when I risk for God, ultimately." Let me tell you why you have to take risks. Guys, we were meant to take risks. Do you know that kids get bored on playgrounds that aren't dangerous enough? When they design playgrounds, they have to decide...

Have you ever taken your kid to a boring playground? I've done this before, and Elon is, like, hanging upside down on the slide. I'm like, "Get off of that!" Why is he doing that? Because it's too boring, so he needs to create a little bit of danger in his own life. I'm wondering if some of your problems...*some* of them...are because you're bored. I think a bored man... Have you ever met a bored man? He is dangerous.

This is why, for the most part... Is there some universe in which maybe, potentially, possibly, a guy could be a stay-at-home dad? Maybe. That's my best answer. I've seen this. Men get bored, and then they start looking at things they shouldn't, and then they start partaking in things just to feel. I'm not just picking on the men. Have you ever met a bored woman? There are a lot of them in this city, especially as they get older. They drink too much. They shop too much. They're too worried about what everybody else is doing.

God didn't create us to be bored. The story of Scripture is people take risks, and the reward is on the other side of risk. You read any book on risk, and it says *this*: always take a risk where the upside is better than the downside. Well, that makes sense. Isn't that every risk we take for Christ?

Guys, we don't risk because... We're not adrenaline junkies. I started following this guy on Instagram. He climbs skyscrapers without a rope. Every time his post comes up on Instagram, my hands start to sweat just looking at it. I'm like, "Why are you doing this?" I can't look away. We don't risk for the sake of risk. We don't risk because we're naïve and think nothing bad could happen. We risk because we love people.

01 RAHAB'S HOSPITALITY

I want to show you this. I want to show you what happens here. So, they send out. They risk. Let's continue on. He tells them to go see the land, and then look at what happens at the end of verse 1. ***"And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there."*** Back then, as you know, there wasn't Airbnb. There wasn't Vrbo. They go into this land.

You have to ask this question (and you're supposed to)...*Why are they at a prostitute's house?* I mean, this is an earthy story. This is a story that's hard for religious people, because she's going to lie. She's going to hide things. It's going to get very interesting. There's a moral complexity to this story that doesn't fit well in a lot of our categories.

The first thing that shows up is...*Why are two godly Israelite men at a brothel?* Well, the conservative, fundamental view has been *this*, and I think it's probably right: they were looking for a place to hide, and where's the last place you would look to find godly Israelite men? A brothel. Again, in the text (that's all we have, and that's all we need), we're not told anything inappropriate happened.

One of my rules when I read the text is I always like to go with the harder reading of Scripture because it's probably the true meaning. Is it possible that these guys had a little mission drift, a little mission creep? Have you ever been tempted when *you* travel? All of a sudden, you're outside, and you're all alone. They were buddies, and maybe they both said, "Let's just try this out. No one will ever know." Who knows?

Here's the principle: there is temptation in Canaan. There's temptation on the mission field. I've told you this story before. I knew a missionary. He went to Thailand, if you know all the prostitution in Thailand and all that happens in Thailand. A missionary went to Thailand. He came back. He didn't do anything wrong.

He just told his church, "I can never go to Thailand again. There's too much temptation there."

These men end up in this prostitute's house. Her name is Rahab. The first thing she does is she practices hospitality. By the way, this is the welcoming spirit. For the church, throughout history, Rahab, among others... She's not the first. Abraham also, in the Old Testament, practiced hospitality. She's a picture of hospitality. Here's what hospitality is: welcoming the stranger.

Christians are confused because Christians think fellowship and hospitality are the same things. They're different. They're connected. Fellowship... You have your Christian friends over, and you play games and hang out. You watch a movie and eat a meal. You go over to their house, or whatever. You're all friends, and you hang out together. Amazing. Biblical. It's not called *hospitality*; it's called *fellowship*.

Hospitality is when you welcome the stranger into your home. It could be your Christian brother or sister whom you don't know but would like to get to know better. They're a stranger, but by coming to your home, the stranger will go from... It'll go from hospitality to fellowship over time. Or, even more common, it's the person who's far from God and close to you. They're a stranger to God.

What we're seeing... I'm always watching what's happening in Canada, Australia, and Europe with the church. I don't know this for sure, but Canada feels like 10 years ahead of us, Australia maybe 20, and Europe maybe 30 years ahead of us. What we're finding out there is that the main way the mission of God is going forward is through hospitality. It's through Christians inviting their non-Christian friends and neighbors and family members into their homes and sharing their lives with them.

In the midst of sharing their lives...not having an agenda, just asking good questions...the gospel, Christianity, spirituality, comes up, and that's how the mission moves forward. Think about this. Most people in Winston-Salem will never come to church. That becomes more and more true the more post-Christian you get.

Imagine if you moved to Dubai. Say you're not religious. You're not Christian and you're not non-Christian. You just move to Dubai. There's a mosque next door to you. Are you going to go to that mosque? What if the pastor is funny, he's a good preacher, and they're doing a marriage series? What if they have great music? What if they have a cool kids' ministry? You're not going. You've just made decisions about what a mosque is and how you think about it.

Would you go to a Muslim's house who you were friends with if they invited you over for dinner? Yes, you would. The reason we don't practice hospitality... There are many reasons. First, we're not home. You minister out of margin. You do mission out

of margin. Most of us are never home. We travel. We're busy. Our kids are playing sports five nights a week.

I don't even know the answer to all of these questions, because it's hard. You're like, "I have five nights this week. We only have two nights free. I need to have a date night." I get it. It's all complex. The average family, they tell us now, only eats four meals a week together. There are 21 meals a week to be had. The average American family eats four.

Of American workers, 80 percent never eat lunch with anyone else. There's a new phrase called *desktop dining*, where people just take 15 to 20 minutes to eat at their desk. I think we live in a time where we're just very lonely. I was reading a book on counseling, and the guy said about half the people who come in and think they're depressed are really lonely. Isn't that interesting? They try to diagnose. It's like, "Dude, you're not... Here's what depression is. That's not you. You're lonely."

What would it look like for you to invite someone over one meal a month? There are 84 meals a month. Could you, one meal a month, have somebody in your home who's far from God and close to you? You don't have an agenda. That's what's scary. You're like, "No, no. I believe God is at work in people's lives. I believe there's a reason we have a relationship. All I want to do is have you over, have no agenda, and share my life."

Here's the key, and this is another reason... Some people (maybe some of *you*) don't have good relational skills. There are people all the time... "What would I do? What would we talk about?" Learn how to ask 10 good questions, and that'll just be great. People love to talk about themselves. Learn to ask a great question and listen.

One of the other main reasons is we tend to view our house not as a catalyst for ministry but as a castle to where we escape. It's like, "Get me in my garage. Let me hit my button. The only thing I know about my neighbors is the stickers on the back of their car. Okay, they have three kids and a dog. That's all I know."

02 RAHAB'S HIDING & LYING (MORAL COMPLEXITY)

Guys, it gets really interesting. Here we go. Check this out. Verse 2: ***"And it was told to the king of Jericho..."*** We're not sure how he hears. ***"Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.' Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, 'Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.' But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them."*** Focus on that.

"And she said, 'True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.'" Lie number one. "And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went." Lies number two and three. "Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." Lie number four.

"But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax..." Some of you will be glad to know those are gluten free. True story. ***"...that she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out."***

What an interesting, morally complex story. Here's what's interesting: she hides them, she lies about them, and she's praised for doing it. Very similar to the midwives. Remember when the midwives... Pharaoh says, "I want you to kill all of the males," and they say, "We can't do that because, actually, the women have the babies so quickly." That was a lie.

The next verse after they lied says, "And God blessed them." You're like, "Could you put that verse a little later so that I maybe won't connect it with the lying?" This is a morally complex story. Let's take it apart together.

First of all, what does she do? She hides, and she lies. How does she know how to hide and lie? Those are the two things she got very good at while being a prostitute. Because what do prostitutes do? They lie all the time. They tell men they're good-looking when they're not. They tell people they're enjoying something when they're not. They lie to themselves. They lie to everybody they know about what they do.

What is the number-one thing you have to be good at if you're a prostitute? You have to be able to hide men. If you're running a brothel, you have to learn how to get men in and out of places. So, wait a second. This is where you're like, "Okay, so God uses..." The very thing she was using for evil in the past God is now going to use for good. It's something like this: God uses you where you are with what you have.

I'm not justifying the lying (we'll get to that in a minute), but sometimes you'll wake up, and you're like, "Man, I learned all of these skills, and I have all of these gifts, and I have all of these talents." Sometimes you look at a part of your life, and you're like, "And I used it all for negative. I used my relational skills to manipulate women." Okay. Well, don't do that anymore. That would be using it negatively.

Or you could say... A lot of people use their gifts neutrally. They just don't use them for the kingdom of God. Some of you are so relational, and you're great at sales, and you've never thought, "Maybe I should use this winsome relational skill set I have to share the gospel with other people. Maybe this is part of how God has given me the gift of evangelism."

Some of you just know how to make an enormous amount of money. It's like a superpower. We all know it's not easy to make money. There are just some people... You meet them, and you're like, "Oh my goodness. You just have the Midas touch." Maybe God is going to use you not just to make a lot of money, but to be able to strategically and generously think about how to give it to the kingdom of God.

Some people have the mind of a strategic thinker. They SWOT analysis everything. They strategically plan out. They see the ups and downs and threats and opportunities of everything. Have you ever thought about it for the mission of God? See, with Rahab, God begins to redeem the darkest parts of her life.

But what about lying? She lies four times. This isn't a white lie. She lies four times, and in the book of James she's praised for it. It was the number-one way she protected the spies. Now, should you lie? The answer to that is *no*. Come on, guys. This is a fairly simple question. You're all looking around. "Should we lie?" The answer is *no*. What have we been doing for six and a half years here, guys? No, you don't lie.

Here's what's interesting about this story. What's fun for me is, on Mondays, I normally read the commentaries. A commentary is a scholarly book on this text, usually written by someone who's not a pastor, which is great, and I've learned a lot from them. What I realize is a lot of these guys live in ivory towers. They're not living in the real world. They're not pastors. They're not seeing the ups and downs of people's lives.

By the way, the moral complexity you feel is usually only when you're on the front lines. Talk to somebody who has been at war. You go to war, and all you deal with the whole time you're there is the moral complexity of the situation you're in. "How should I do this, and is this war just?" You wrestle with all of that.

So, here's what's happening in this story. There are two commands of God that appear that they cannot both be obeyed at the same time. What's the command? "Tell the truth." Other command: "Protect innocent life." There are two ways people answer this.

The very fundamentalist person says, "Well, actually, what Rahab did was wrong. There's always a third way. You never would have to break one of God's commandments. He would never put you in a situation where you'd have to break it." I'm sympathetic to that because it's nice and clean, and it makes you feel like, "Great. This is good. I have a category for everything. Everything is in its place."

Then you have the other way to think about this, that every once in a while, in a broken, fallen, sinful, rebellious world, a world we're living in, which is not the way

God originally designed it... Every once in a while, normally when you're on the front-line missions, you have two conflicting absolutes, and you have to decide what the greater moral imperative is in that moment.

If you were hiding Jews in your house in Germany and the Nazis came to your door and said, "Are you hiding Jews?" I'm guessing you're going to lie. Maybe afterward you're like, "Do I repent of that lie or not? Was that okay? Is there a universe in which, under a certain circumstance, you *should* lie? I thought we're not supposed to..."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that great theologian, German... He was in Germany, and he planned multiple times to try to assassinate Hitler. He was part of a group. He ended up being hung for this. He tried multiple times to assassinate Hitler. I'm summarizing all his things on this, but Dietrich Bonhoeffer basically said, "I believe it is a sin to plan the assassination and kill Hitler, but I believe it is a greater sin to let him live."

It's like, put *that* in your theological pipe and smoke it. Right? I'm like, "What? My head hurts." Here's what I think we need to learn. What does this mean for all of us? God works through sinners, and God works through sin. I mean, God obviously works through sinners. Who else is he going to work through? We're getting to the point now where it's like, "Okay..."

Rahab isn't even a Christian yet, we'd say, until verse 8. We're not going to see her believe. So, is God using a Canaanite, unbelieving prostitute for his mission? It appears so. But then God works through sin. Now, God works through obedience. His revealed will is "Obey, and I'm going to bless, and I'm going to work through that," but when you look back in the rearview mirror of your life, you see God works through sin in some kind of "You're bigger than this. You're so great you can move all of this together for our good and your glory."

Think about the story of Joseph. We're going to look at that this summer. The story of Joseph is a bunch of terrible things happen, and then he looks back at his brothers at the end, and he partly comforts them, which, by the way, this *is* comforting. "Hey, you meant this for evil (that was throwing me in a well and lying about me and all of the other things you did), but God meant it for good."

Guys, this is how the world works. Last week, a couple came up to me before or after one of the services. They were like, "Pastor Kyle, I've got a really cool story to tell you." "I love it. Tell it to me." They said, "This is crazy. We were visiting another church, and we met this girl we knew from the past who's a strong Christian. We hadn't seen her in a couple of years. Her life kind of... A lot of crazy things happened."

They said, "First of all, she started to date a non-Christian a couple of years ago." Now, should a Christian date a non-Christian? No. Okay. We'd say that was a sin. Then they got emotionally attached, and they started having sex. They were sleeping together, and she got pregnant. Should you be sleeping around before you're married? No. That's also sin.

Then she has the baby. She decides, thank God, to have the baby. She says to her boyfriend, "We can't be dating anymore because I'm a Christian. I'm sorry at what I've been doing. This baby has woken me up to this." He was like, "Well, what should I do?" She goes, "Here's a Bible." He starts reading the Bible. He comes to faith in Christ, gets baptized, and they get married. They're now raising a godly child.

None of us really want that story. You want the "We were perfectly pure when we married on our 22nd birthday." That's the religious spirit that wants to act like everything is okay, and everything is in neat categories, and everybody has a clean life, and God only works through my obedience; he doesn't work through my disobedience. So, what we see is this powerful picture of God redeeming the story of Rahab.

03 RAHAB'S CONVERSION & CONFESSION (FROM RAHAB'S LIE TO HER TRUTH)

Let me show you what happens next. She tells this lie, and then she runs up on the roof. Look at verse 8. ***"Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, 'I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.'"***

Here's what's interesting. The spies don't start a spiritual conversation with Rahab. Rahab has to have the spiritual conversation with the spies. I think this is a rebuke to the spies. This is very similar, if you know your New Testament... There's a story in Acts 10 where Peter gets this vision from God. "Hey, go to Cornelius' house." He goes to Cornelius' house, and if you read the text carefully, he doesn't share the gospel with Cornelius.

You're like, "This is the apostle Peter, the rock upon which Christ is going to build the church, and he doesn't want to share the gospel with this guy because he's Greek?" Cornelius has to ask *him* about God, and he goes, "Oh man..." I'm summarizing. He goes, "Oh man, I'm so sorry. Now I see that God can save anybody. I had in my mind a category of people God doesn't save."

I don't know if this is how the spies thought. "Oh man. I mean, she's helpful, but God doesn't save prostitutes. God doesn't work in these people's lives." Then she comes to them. She's a great picture of saving faith. I'll show you this for a few verses. Saving faith first realizes that God is going to judge and wants to be saved from the judgment of God. That's the heart of Christianity.

Yes, if you come to Christ, will your life get better? Maybe. I don't know. If you come to Christ, will your family come back together? I don't know. Maybe. If you come to Christ, do you get a community? Yeah, the church is great, but the main reason you come to faith in Christ is you realize... I remember being 16 years old, realizing, "Oh my goodness."

I remember sitting in Spanish 3 class, 16 years old, realizing, "I am a sinner on my way to hell." It was through the faithful witness of a friend sharing the gospel with me. I realized, "I'm in the path of the wrath of God, and Christ died for my sins, and the cross is the place where Jesus paid my penalty and was my substitute." This is exactly what she's saying. Basically, "I know God is going to judge."

Today in America we don't believe, often, in a judging God. By the way, that's just because we're so domesticated and so comfortable. It's actually harder, technically, to believe in a loving God than a judging God. Go over to where there's a dictator. Go over to where there's rape and pillaging. Go over to where there's injustice and, believe me, people believe in a judging God there.

In America, our lives are so comfortable and so easy we just think, "Oh, how could God ever judge anyone? He's a loving God." He's a loving God and a judging God. Look at what she puts her faith in. Look at verse 10. ***"For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction."***

Her faith is in historical events. That's exactly what our Christian faith is. Our Christian faith is not in principles or practices. It's not in faith itself. We don't have faith in faith. We don't have faith in feelings. It's not in a myth or a fairy tale or a fable. Our faith, just so you know, if you're new and you want to understand Christianity... Our faith is in historical events and what they mean. That's it.

So, her faith was in the drying up of the Red Sea, the parting of the Red Sea, and what that said about God. When you open up your New Testament, you have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. What are those? You can think about it *this* way: the Gospels are the historical events you're supposed to believe in. The birth, the life, the teaching, the ministry, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus would be a good summary of those four gospels.

So, why did Paul write 13 letters? Don't we just need the Gospels? Why do we need 13 letters from Paul? Why do we need Hebrews? Why did Peter write some letters? Why do we have these letters? It's because what we need is not just the events; we need the explanation of the events, the divine interpretation of the events, the meaning of the events.

So, you read about the events, and you go, "Oh, Jesus had to live a perfect life because God wants a perfect record, and I haven't lived a perfect life, and Jesus is my perfection." Guys, the people who stood at the cross and watched Jesus die... None of them understood it. Paul had to tell us, "In Christ the world is being reconciled to God." What?

"Oh, Jesus Christ was my substitute. He was my perfection in his life and my punishment in his death, and the resurrection was God's two thumbs up to say, 'I have accepted the payment my Son has made on your behalf, and when you trust in him, you one day will go through death into life.'"

So, her faith is in these personal events. Then, finally, she just makes a statement about God. Look at verse 11. ***"And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath."***

We'll see in a moment she's going to show her faith in works, but this is the end of her confession of faith. Rahab comes to, what we'd say, faith in Christ. She believes in Yahweh is how they would say it back then. Here's what I want us to see. Rahab is a picture that nobody is too far gone for God to save them.

I've learned this over the years. When you're talking to people who aren't Christians, there are large categories of people you could talk to. Probably what's most common is the arrogant person who thinks they're fine how they are and doesn't think they need God. That's probably the average person in Winston-Salem.

They got a trophy for everything they did their whole life. They've been told they're a snowflake their whole life, and they compare themselves to other people, so they feel good about themselves, but they choose who they compare themselves to, so they feel good about themselves. That's a whole type of person. That's not who this sermon is for.

This sermon is for the people who feel like they're too far gone. Have you ever met those people? The people who feel like they're damaged goods, the people who feel like they're categorized by something they did or something that was done to them. So, there's "Rahab the prostitute." It could have been "Rahab the divorced," "Rahab the drunk," "Rahab the abused," "Rahab the angry mom," "Joe the alcoholic."

We have all of these different kinds of identities. Let me encourage you if you feel some of this. You are not the worst thing you've ever done. We live in this cancel culture. You see this. You're like, these people... Otherwise, they live decent lives. I'm not even justifying what they did. I'm not even thinking of one person.

But somebody does something, and it's like, "Well, that's what you're known for now. That's your last tweet. You're canceled and dead to all of us. The number one thing we will talk about for the rest of your life is the one terrible thing you did." Who wants to live under that?

They say the number-one thing about a totalitarian government is a totalitarian government always reminds you "You have a secret, and we will find it out. You'd better get in line, because we will find out the worst thing you've ever done, and we will tell everybody you know." No one can live under that.

When you get to heaven, if you ever want to see Rahab... One of the Jewish traditions is that Rahab was one of the most beautiful women in the Old Testament. So, maybe you get to heaven... I don't know how this works. You say to yourself, "I'd like to see her." There's going to be a long line for Abraham. There's going to be a long line for Jacob. It's going to be several hours to meet Joseph, so you're like, "Okay. Let's go down the hallway. Let's meet Rahab." I don't know how this works.

You go to the front desk, and you say, "Hey, I'm here and excited. I want to meet all of the biblical characters. I really want to meet Rahab the prostitute." I think what would happen is they would look on their iPad, or however they do it up there, and they would say something like, "I'm sorry. Rahab the prostitute is not here. Rahab the righteous is here. Rahab the daughter of God is here. Rahab the forgiven is here."

We're going to take Communion a little bit later this morning. Communion reminds us that we can be more defined by what Christ has done for us than what we have done or other people have done to us.

04 HOW RAHAB'S FAITH WAS SHOWN

So, she ends up having this amazing statement of faith. Let me show you really quickly two ways her faith is shown. First, it's shown by caring about the spiritual condition of other people. Look at verse 12.

"Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." And the men said to her, 'Our life for

yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

The first thing is she cares about the spiritual condition of other people. If she was only worried about herself, she would go with the spies right away. Right? "All right. Let's sneak out. I'll go with you guys. I don't want to be here when you come to ransack the city." Instead, she says, "I don't just want to be saved. I want to see other people be saved. Could you save my whole family?"

See, here's what happens. How do you know someone has been born again? They start to care about the spiritual condition of other people. When I was in college ministry, all the time... I know I was blessed to do it. I saw a lot of people come to faith in Christ in college ministry. That's a key time where God is working in people's lives. I'd always wonder when they would tell me they came to Christ...

I'm not trying to be too pessimistic or suspicious, or anything, but I'm always like, "Is it true? Did you really? Was it sincere? Do you really understand?" The moment I knew somebody really came to faith in Christ was usually a week or two after they made a profession of faith, they began to care about people in their dorm. A part of them was... I don't know how to talk about it except it was awakened.

They would say something like, "Hey, I was looking in my dorm, and I think I'm the only Christian. There are 42 people on my hall, and I think they're all headed to hell. I've been praying for them, and I'm particularly praying for my roommate. Could you help me reach my roommate?" It was like, "Oh, dude, you are so spiritually alive." I mean, all you have to do is have a pulse to care about somebody's felt need. You have to be spiritually alive to see somebody's forever needs.

The second thing she does is she has a public outward sign of obedience. Look at this. Verse 15: ***"Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. And she said to them, 'Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.'***

The men said to her, 'We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household.'"

In verses 19-21, that's exactly what she does. She puts out the scarlet rope. Obviously, this is a picture back to the Passover where, by faith, the people put the

blood over the door to say, "We believe." She didn't have a lamb to do that. She's doing that with this scarlet rope.

Here's what this is. This is a first initial step of obedience that's noticed by others and symbolized. How do we have this today? This is baptism. We don't believe here that baptism saves you. The rope didn't save her. The rope was a sign that she *was* saved and *did* believe.

Baptism is where you get up in front of the church and, in one sense, get up in front of the world and say, "I follow Christ, and I'm not heading back. I'm not going back into the world. I'm now fully following Christ." Over the next two weekends, if you've not been baptized, you can have an opportunity to do that. We would love to celebrate with you.

05 CLOSING: WE HAVE NO STORIES TO TELL

So, the story ends with... I guess you could say, first, there's Rahab's lie, and then there's Rahab's truth (her confession), and then there's Rahab's changed life, and then, finally, let's end with the spies. I want you to see what happens here. Verse 22:

"They departed and went into the hills and remained there three days until the pursuers returned, and the pursuers searched all along the way and found nothing. Then the two men [the spies] returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they told him all that had happened to them. And they said to Joshua, 'Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.'"

Here's what they do. The story ends how it began. How does it end? With the spies back with Joshua, and they're there to tell him a story. I can give you the question to ask: Are you a person who takes risks? Here's how you can answer that honestly: Do you have any stories to tell?

We are a generation without stories. These men come back... Could you imagine? We don't know. We don't get the full story. They come back, and Joshua says, "What happened?" They say, "Well, first of all, we got into the land, and we were at this prostitute's house." Joshua is like, "What? Hold on, hold on, hold on."

"And while we're there, the king of Jericho comes, and she actually hides us. We didn't know if she was going to... We were up there praying, and we didn't know if she was going to tell the king of Jericho on us. It might have been the end of it. She doesn't. Then afterward, she comes up, and, Joshua, I'm embarrassed to tell you this: we didn't share about God with her; she asked us.

She heard about what happened at the Red Sea, and she gave her life to the Lord. She actually cares about her family. So when we go back, we've got to watch for this scarlet rope. We're going to actually take care of her whole family." See, they have a story to tell. How many of us have zero stories to tell of our lives?

The only stories we tell are the stories of the shows we've watched. We tell stories of the vacations we take. I think it's one of the reasons we take a vacation. "I need something to do and something to tell other people I did. Honey, let's go spend a lot of money real quick. Let's go somewhere and come back and tell everyone what we did when we were lying out at the beach."

I've watched in my own life. This last week, what was I most excited about? The VIC specials at Harris Teeter. What has happened to my soul? Rib eye was half off. I was so excited. I was telling everyone. Guys, we are a generation that doesn't have any stories anymore.

A couple of weeks ago, I was on a Zoom call with the founder of AIM. It stands for Agape International Missions. We're on this Zoom call. He's on a television. I'm on the other side of the room. They ended up being a Hold the Rope ministry partner. We were actually able, because of your generosity, to give them \$50,000. Here's why.

What happened is I'm on the phone call with him. You know me. I love to talk. I usually talk too much if anything. I hardly said any words because he had so many stories to tell. So, he's sitting on the other end of the call, and I said, "Tell me about AIM." He said, "Well, it started about 20 years ago when my wife and I heard there was sex trafficking in Cambodia. So, we got on a plane to go see what it was all about and if we could help." I thought, "Story." He tells the whole story of that.

He said, "The problem was we got back on the plane afterward... It was so dark, the things we saw were so horrendous, and the living conditions there were so terrible that when we finally got on the plane, my wife said, 'I never want to go back there again in my whole life.'" He said, "We got home. We just felt the Holy Spirit lay on our hearts that we needed to go back. We ended up living there for 15 years." I thought, "Story."

He said, "It was so hard the first two years I had to get my wife a personal security guard." I thought, "What are all of the stories associated with *that*?" He said, "Anyway, we find out that all of the girls who are sex trafficked are sold by their families and lied to or are kidnapped, and almost all of these girls are 8 to 12 years old." Not to be too graphic here, but they're sexually abused multiple times a day every day of their lives.

So he said, "We had to do something." He said, "Basically, what we did was we created a SWAT team for Jesus." He said there was one church that they needed to raise money to help the SWAT team, so the pastor... I may do this one day, so get ready. The pastor got up here and said, "We're doing a special offering this month. It's called Bullets for Jesus." This could work in North Carolina.

He said, "It's called Bullets for Jesus. We need vests. We need guns. We need ammo, and we need to pay for the SWAT team." The church gave abundantly, and they were able to fund this. This SWAT team goes in, and they rescue these girls, 8 to 12 years old, out of this brothel. I thought, "How many stories are there there?" Then they prosecute the men who are leading the brothels.

By the way, that's the going spirit, going and getting the girls. Then they bring the girls back to a safe place where every four girls gets a mom. That's the welcoming spirit. It takes both spirits to do these risks. All the girls can do at first is draw pictures of what happened to them. He said if you see the pictures, you'll just cry. They can't process it. So, they lead them to Christ. They disciple them. They give them jobs. They grow up.

He said, "For certain women, if they're mentally, emotionally, and spiritually ready, we send them as spies back to the brothels." They don't do anything in the brothel. They go to the brothel and say, "I'm interested in working for you. I want to know how you do it." They said the guys running the brothels are all too willing to give them a full tour of the brothel, where they then take notes, go back to the SWAT team, and the SWAT team goes and gets them all.

I'm sitting there on this call going, "I am a little boy. I have never done anything significant in my life." Guys, we want to be a conversion community. A *conversion community* is a place where stories are told. It's a place where we can't even show all of the videos of all of the stories of all of the ways the gospel is going forward.

So, would you take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship? For some of you... Women, I'll ask you to lead on this. Would you lead in the welcoming risk? Would you say, "Could we have one time a month, one meal a month... Could we have someone in our home who's far from God and close to us?"

All of us, could we do the going risk? Years ago, I read a book called *Just Walk Across the Room*. It's my favorite book ever on evangelism. It's written by this pastor. He was a very gifted pastor. Actually, more than that, he was a really gifted evangelist. I encourage you to go get the book. You read the book, and you go, "Can all of these stories be true?"

Every chapter is a story of him walking across the room. One of the chapters, he's like, "Hey, I'm in the room, and I'm at this business event. I see a guy, and he looks like he's not doing well. I felt the Holy Spirit say to walk across the room. I go over there, and I realize he had a moral failure recently. I tell him how Jesus loves to save people who are in moral failures, and he gives his life to Christ." I'm like, "He what?"

He's like, "Yeah, I was in the cab..." Because they didn't have Uber back then. "I'm in the cab, and we're going to this event. I tell the guy what God did in my life, and he says, 'God would never save a piece of junk like me.'" He said, "I'm going to walk across the room. I'm going to tell him the truth." He goes, "I led my taxi driver to Christ." I'm like, "What?"

Where do you need to walk across the room tomorrow? What decisions do you need to make? Jesus Christ did not sacrifice for you and me to play it safe. The resurrection, by the way, is the great hope we have to take risks. The number-one rule on taking risk is always take a risk where the upside is better than the downside. I think that's every risk for Christ.

Okay. The downside of trying to reach out to your neighbors: they think you're weird. The upside: they're in heaven. I think the upside is a little bit bigger than the downside. Here's what I want you to know as a church. I mean this. We are behind you guys. The first week I was doing ministry at Duke University, I got in trouble with the administration. That's not fun.

When you get an email from an official person on the Duke administrative staff, it's scary. It was my first week on the job. I was working for the church. I went back to my pastor and said, "I am so sorry. I might be getting kicked off Duke's campus." He said, "Don't ever apologize for sharing the gospel." We are going to stand behind you, and we are for you. What I want you to know is we are behind you guys.

As you're scared to say something at work, or you're scared to say something with your family... This whole service is designed to encourage you...the prayers we pray, the Word we look at, the songs we sing. I want us to be a risk-taking church. So, I want to solidify this in prayer, that we would be a church that takes personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship. Let's pray.

Lord, I just lift up right now the men and women in this church, and I pray over them the going, riskful spirit, Lord. That doesn't necessarily mean crossing an ocean and learning a language. That's the picture of the missionary going. But it might mean making a phone call. It might mean asking a spiritual question. Lord, I pray for many women, especially, in this room to lead in the welcoming spirit of risk.

For some, they've been wrestling and praying through foster care and adoption, and they need to take their next step. For others, it's just they need to open their home to someone in their neighborhood or someone in their workplace. Lord, we see so many stories. The story of the conversion of Rahab... Her salvation comes because, actually, she took risks and the spies took risks, Lord. Together, may we do the same. We ask all this in Jesus' name, amen.