

Session 1—Choose

The Heart's "Yes" to God

Principal Text: Joshua 2:1-21

Supportive Texts: Matthew 1:1-5a; Matthew 21:28-32; Hebrew 11:31.

We will consider:

- What are the reasons or experiences that motivate us to say “yes” to God?
- The role of humility and obedience in discipleship.
- What qualifies Christ’s followers for service?

Hymn Suggestions (*Found in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*)

“All Creatures of Our God and King” verses 1, 4 and 7, #835.

Prayer

God in heaven above and on earth below, open our eyes to witness your glory made manifest in your creation, on earth and in heaven. Open our ears to hear of the mighty and marvelous ways you lead your people from generation to generation, and our hearts to discern the gracious invitation you offer. Open our mouths to witness to the work of your hands in our lives and in those around us. May your saving presence move us to worship you and may the choices we make testify that we follow you faithfully in our thoughts, words and actions! Through Christ, the one who came seeking us, we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Reflecting on Christ as the redeemer and saviour, and as the one who is to come deepens our faith. All the Bible studies in this series point to this Christ Jesus.

But could a woman of ill repute, branded as a ‘harlot’ in the Bible serve as a starting point for a nine-session Bible study? How could she become a model for faithful, devoted people of God who want to go further in their faith journey and deepen their understanding and experience of God?

This nine-session study emphasizes the infinite possibilities and limitless opportunities all kinds of people have with God, whatever their background or the life choices they’ve made.

Today we name women like Rahab “sex workers” in an effort to take the sting of discrimination out of the labels we put on them. But, at best, the discrimination is only blunted. We do look down on them or, at the very least, pity them. Yet, in every one of these women’s lives, as in our own, the invitation from God is eternal and is made known through Christ.

But trusting God is a decision we make both individually and corporately. God chose to be in relationship with us and sent Jesus as atonement for our sins; to bridge the broken relationship between God and humankind, between one another and between humans and the rest of creation.

How Then Shall We Live? Following Christ in a Broken World

Christ has accomplished this reconciliation, but we need to accept Christ's power to transform our lives. Faith is our side of the embrace initiated by God, which allows us to fully tap into this power.

In Rehab we see a woman who, in faith, was able to imagine a new way of life; one of respect, honour and grace.

The first four Bible studies in this series reflect on the lives of women of faith from the genealogy of Jesus Christ as found in the first chapter of the gospel of Matthew. There are five women mentioned drawn from different periods, and we follow four of their stories. Two are from a Jewish background and two from a foreign background. They all have something in common—a defining moment in their lives in which they had to make a clear choice that made it possible for them to enter the genealogy of a very human Jesus Christ. Each session emphasizes and brings focus to the centrality of women in the story of faith.

Read Joshua 2:1-21

Jericho, the city in which this story is located, is known as the City of Palms. In its present location, it is said to be about 3400 years old. However, it was known as one of the oldest civilizations, with settlements dating back as far as 11,000 BCE.

“According to archeological findings, the city of Jericho was surrounded by two walls with a space of about 15 feet between them. Houses of sun-dried brick were built over the gap between the two walls and supported by timbers laid from one wall to the other or by cross walls. Rahab's house was in one of these strategic points, and her window looked on the outer wall.”¹

The spies who visited the harlot's house, may have been sent by Joshua because it was run like an inn that took in foreigners and/or provided a sexual service. Therefore, if the strangers were seen going in and out of such a place it would not arouse suspicion—or so the two men thought.

Rahab must have had an enquiring mind because she was aware of the work of the Lord in the life of the Israelites from a distant place. She probably gleaned these stories from the visitors she had entertained. One could assume that she was a clever and enterprising woman because she used the opportunity at hand, by currying favour with the strangers who she understood were God's people, and took a great risk in sheltering them. She was also able to talk her way out of a life-threatening situation by falsely assuring the king that the strangers had gone away. She obviously had cared for her family deeply because she was able to negotiate their safety and security with the strangers. Moreover she was able to prove herself to be an astute strategist by advising them to go up the mountain, wait it out for three days until the search team returned, and then go back to their camps.

All her wits however, fade into insignificance before the knowledge she has of the God of Israel, not only as the God of their destiny, but as the God of heaven and earth. Knowing about God is different from knowing God. She not only knew about this God, but she also confessed to God's lordship by calling 'yhwh' as the “God in heaven above and on earth below.” Her faith also enabled her to receive strangers without enmity and in peace.

¹ Deen, Edith. *All the Women of the Bible*, page 65. Harper SanFrancisco, 1988.

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That Rahab had been prostituted ceased to have any claim on what she was able to become. Though a foreigner, through her faith she entered the household of God and later became the mother of Boaz, the husband of Ruth.

God graciously provides each one of us with several opportunities to know and to follow God. Rahab is one of the two women named in another genealogy, a genealogy of faith in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11. The *Amplified Bible* says in Hebrews 11:31 “[Prompted] by faith Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed along with those who refused to believe *and* obey, because she had received the spies in peace [without enmity].”

Discussion

1. Can a prostitute be called a woman of faith? What makes you say that?
2. Which verse strikes you as Rahab’s faith confession? Why?
3. What ultimate concerns may have led Rahab to faith?

Read Matthew 21:31

1. What conditions might push women to become sex trade workers?
2. Could we name peoples, structures and systems that perpetuate such a lifestyle?
3. How can we help turn around the search light of self-righteousness that discriminates against sex workers?

Closing Discussion

In every one of our lives there arises occasions that test our faith, but also enable us to confess to our faith. Is it possible to see crises as opportunities for growing in faith? How are we willing to prove our faith as well as declare it? What do we need to personally let go of to be able to access God’s gracious invitation to be his followers? What part of our own lives needs to be turned around (reconciled) to make us recognizable as people of faith by those around us?

God of heaven and earth is always willing to turn our lives around. God is actively pursuing us, each and every day, in order to make this possible. When we accept God’s mercy and grace all that we are and all that we have can be transformed into what we are called to become.

Closing Prayer (*Individually, in silence.*)

Text for Remembrance—Psalm 103:11-12 (*Said together.*)

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.”