

What Is Faith?

A Case Study of Rahab the Harlot.

Just believe! Such faith, exhibited by many within the pan-evangelical church of, runs a severe risk of being misplaced. For many, faith has become “faith in feelings.” As a friend of mine used to say, Christians these days get all excited over excitements. But if individual and inner emotions become the standard of faith, then such faith finds its origin within one’s feelings, and that is a miserable place for faith to reside. In such a place, faith may be “personal,” but it’s no more than that. Theologians call this *fideism*, or faith in faith apart from any rational or vilitional considerations. Excess emphasis on emotionalism reduces faith to romanticism, and as such, enhancement of personal faith could be stimulated by reading feel-good books, watching feel-good movies, or listening to feel-good songs. All of this and more can extol the magic of believing.

Have you ever listened to the song, “I Believe!”? The lyrics read: “I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows.” [1] While the lyrics sound upbeat and positive--words that ooze with a message of positivity and possibility--they are essentially false. One drop of rain does not produce an equivalent flower. Flower lovers may wish it to be were so, but it’s not. This is one example of romantic but vacuous faith. Ultimately, faith will rise no higher than the object into which it is placed. If it originates and resides within one’s soul experiences, then that’s where it will remain until disillusionment might extinguish it. But biblical faith demands a subject who believes within, and an object who is believed without. For example, we turn to Rahab the Harlot.

Hebrews states: **“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace”** (Hebrews 11:31). In light of the current confusion about faith, it behooves us to look at what characterized Rahab’s faith.

First, from the polytheism of her pagan Canaanite culture, Rahab came to believe in the one God of Israel, the Lord God Yahweh. As she confessed to the two spies, **“the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath”** (Joshua 2:11). Rahab renounced faith in the pagan territorial deities of the Canaanites and trusted in the solitary God of Israel, Yahweh (Deuteronomy 6:4). Rahab rejected polytheism and embraced monotheism. Putting all other religious options aside, Rahab put her faith in the one God of Israel. **“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is”** (Hebrews 11:6). The faith the Father extols is belief that begins not with faith in faith, but by believing the **“God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”** Implicitly, faith believes in God’s **PERSON**. Pluralism (the world’s religions are but differing paths that lead to the same God) and syncretism (the best religion is that which combines features of all the world’s diverse faiths) do not evidence genuine faith.

Too, virtuous faith also believes in God’s **PROMISES**, or his Word. Rahab admitted to the spies, **“I know that the Lord has given you the land”** (Joshua 2:9). Whose land was she talking

about? Answer: Her own. Imagine, she believed that God could give her land to someone else, to another nation of people (See Genesis 12:7; 13:14-18; 15:18-21; 17:6-8; 26:1-5; 28:1-4.). In a way of speaking, Rahab's faith in the Lord's Word caused her to waive her own property rights! Unlike Rahab, professing Christians who do not accept God's Word at face value and waive their rights to their stuff, do not evidence real faith.

Even though the reports filtered down to her by word of mouth, Rahab also believed in the greatness of God's **POWER** by which he redeemed Israel from Egypt. As Rahab related to the spies, "**For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea . . .**" (Joshua 2:10). Some Christians think they can possess a faith stripped of the miraculous. But such a faith cannot save. For example, Christianity minus the miraculous time-matter-space resurrection of Jesus Christ is futile faith (See 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.). Saving faith confesses "**Jesus as Lord**" and heartily believes "**that God raised Him from the dead**" (Romans 10:9; Compare Romans 1:4.). Liberal Christians who do not believe in Jesus' material resurrection do not evidence real faith.

Finally, true faith demands **PENITENCE**. Matthew records that she repented of her harlotries (She is no longer named a harlot!), married Salmon, and together via their son's birth (Boaz) became the great, great grandparents of King David, the royal family out of which Jesus the Messiah descended (Matthew 1:5). True faith renounces a former sinful lifestyle (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:5.). In that many evangelicals reflect no change in lifestyle--according to researchers there is little or no difference in behavior between born-again and non-born-again--we can only deduce genuine faith is absent.

True faith is not "faith in faith," but believes in the person, promises and power of the one and only biblical God all the while exhibiting real change-of-life penitence for sin in the face of His holiness and righteousness.

ENDNOTE

[1] "I Believe!" Though performed by a number of artists, the author is unknown. Lyrics at: <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20060828114836AAFJA4W>.