

Series: Biblical Heroes and Zeros – week 2

CDOBC – beginning on 10/17/10

Title: ***“Rescued from Ruin”***

October 31, 2010 – Reformation Sunday

Selected Passages

OBJECTIVE: To help people understand that no sinner is beyond God’s love, forgiveness, and truth.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Love & Respect Conference
- Wycliffe Associates Banquet
- First Taste Luncheon – Nov. 14
- TKU to everyone who helped with Fall Festival – special thanks and gift to Sheryl Beyer

Reformation Sunday Reflection

Luther’s 95 Theses statements – nailed to the church door at Wittenburg (Oct. 31, 1517 – 493 yrs. ago). These statements were posted in this public manner so that they could be debated. These statements were targeted at the practice of indulgences in the 16th century, which had become so corrupt, that salvation was being promised to those who would give certain amounts of money to the church. Although one of the Reformation’s theological pillars of *Sola Fide* – or “Faith Alone” is not clearly developed when Luther posted his statements, we can see the roots of this Biblical truth which would later grow into the doctrine we know today – that salvation comes only through faith in Christ – not in good works...not even in good religious works.

Selected statements from Luther’s ‘95’

#32 - All those who believe themselves certain of their own salvation by means of letters of indulgence, will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.

#33 - We should be most carefully on our guard against those who say that the papal indulgences are an inestimable divine gift, and that a man is reconciled to God by them.

#42 - Christians should be taught that the pope does not at all intend that the purchase of indulgences should be understood as at all comparable with the works of mercy.

#52 - It is vain to rely on salvation by letters of indulgence, even if the commissary, or indeed the pope himself, were to pledge his own soul for their validity.

#68 - Nevertheless, they (*indulgences*) are not to be compared with the grace of God and the compassion shown in the Cross.

Transition to song: “My Faith Has Found A Resting Place” #405

Opening Prayer

Each of the heroes in Scripture are people who sought to please God with their life. They are people who had faith in the Lord and their faith was the driving force in their life. Many of these people came from ‘normal’ backgrounds. What I mean by this, is that most of them came from the average groups within society. Nothing made them different from their neighbors, they had normal occupations, but their faith transformed them into Biblical heroes.

However, the heroes we will look at today were not from the average groups of society. They were outcasts – they were sinners who excelled at the practice – and one was possessed by seven demons! No...these three women were not from the ranks of common citizens...which makes God’s work in their life and their faith in God even more amazing...more heroic!

We see people rescued from danger every week on T.V. news and many T.V. shows. Today, we will see three women who were “Rescued From Ruin”, and there are three truths about the Gospel that I want us to understand this morning. The first point is:

God forgives any sinner if they have faith in Him.

There is no sinner who is beyond the love and grace of God.
This hero is: Rahab

We are first introduced to Rahab in Joshua 2:1. Joshua is speaking to the two spies he is sending into the Promised Land as he prepares to lead the nation of Israel into battle, and he tells them, “Go, look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.”

Rahab was a prostitute – a harlot – and she lived in Jericho...a strongly fortified city that was in the crosshairs of the nation of Israel as they planned the conquest of the Promised Land. Now,

you might be wondering why they entered the house of a prostitute, or you might be questioning their moral integrity wondering if they were engaging in the local customs while they scouted out the city and its defenses. **First**, The Bible never hints at any immoral behavior by the spies. In fact, in light of the sin of one soldier (Joshua 7:1), Israel suffered a tremendous loss in the following battle of Ai. I think we can safely say that if the spies acted immorally in Rahab's home, then the nation would have suffered. **Second**, they probably sought out a prostitute's home because of the normal secrecy that would be assumed in such a place. The men who would visit a prostitute knew that discretion was part of the deal - and for the spies, the fewer the questions, the better. Also, a **third** reason why they went to Rahab's house is that she lived on the wall of Jericho, and the wall of Jericho was its greatest defense, so her home was the perfect place for them to gain intelligence about the city and its defenses.

As the text tells us there in Joshua 2, the officials of the city were immediately tipped off that Rahab had taken these two Israelite spies into her home. They waste no time in sending a search party to Rahab's house – but she had already hid them on her roof. After she diverts the officials and sends them on a fruitless search, she talks with the spies – and she states her faith in the God of Israel.

Joshua 2:8-11

“Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, "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...When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

Rahab made a clear profession of faith in the God of Israel. She was risking her life by hiding the spies, but she did so because she had found the one, true God.

She made a deal with the spies – their safety for the safety of her and her family – and Joshua lives up to the agreement (see 6:24-25) “Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD’s house. 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.”

However, possibly the most amazing passage of Scripture concerning Rahab is what is written about her in the N.T. The writer of Hebrews lists Rahab in chapter 11 – a list of the faithful throughout history...a Biblical ‘hall of fame’ for the faithful!

Heb. 11:31

“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.”

James, the brother of Jesus says of Rahab, “... In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?”

James 2:25

But in Matthew, we have the greatest honor bestowed upon Rahab – this redeemed prostitute is listed in the line of Jesus.

Matt. 1:5-6

“Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.”

It doesn’t matter what sins have littered your life. When you put your faith in God – in Christ - and repent, He will forgive you!

From the second hero on our list today, we will see that:

God loves you - even with your past.

This hero is: Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene appears in the Gospels. In fact, she is mentioned in all four Gospels, and she has the great distinction of being the first person that the resurrected Jesus appeared to.

“Magdalene” is not a last name, but it does serve to distinguish her from the other Marys mentioned in the Bible. “Magdalene” refers to

a tiny fishing village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee – named *Magdala* (Matt. 15:9 – some translations *Magadan*).

There are many Bible teachers who have speculated about Mary Magdalene's past. Not to be outdone, in the DaVinci Code, Dan Brown and Hollywood put forth many lies about Mary and Jesus' relationship. The truth is, Scripture simply doesn't tell us any details about Mary's past – except one very important one...she was possessed by seven demons that Jesus healed her of.

Luke 8:1-3

“After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³ Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

Mary was not the only person that Jesus healed from demon possession. The Gospels give us numerous accounts of this happening (Matt. 8:28-34; 9:32-33; 12:22; Mark 9:25; Luke 13:11-13), and as a result of Jesus healing her, Mary Magdalene became a disciple of Jesus. She helped to support His ministry through the financial means she had. We don't know how she attained the finances to do this...possibly an inheritance...she might have been a widow whose husband was wealthy...we're not sure. But in Scripture, and especially in the account of Mary Magdalene, the emphasis is not on the past, but on the present and the future! The emphasis is not on what you did before you met Christ, but what you did after you have met Him!

Mary Magdalene is mentioned frequently in the account of Jesus' crucifixion. At first, Mary and some of the other women who were disciples of Jesus were near the cross (John 19:25 “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”), but as the hours passed by, the angry and ridiculing crowd seems to have forced

them toward the back of the group (Matt. 27:55-56 “Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. ⁵⁶ Among them were **Mary Magdalene**, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.”).

After Jesus was taken down from the cross, and Joseph of Arimathae received permission from Pilate to take the body, Mary and others watched as Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped and anointed the body and placed it in the tomb (Matt. 27:59-61 “Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. **Mary Magdalene** and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.”).

The Gospels then tell us that Mary Magdalene along with the other women planned to visit the tomb first thing on Sunday morning – after the Sabbath – so they could give Jesus’ body a proper anointing – one that wasn’t so rushed (Luke 23:56 “Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.” Mark 16:1 “When the Sabbath was over, **Mary Magdalene**, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body.”).

However, when the women arrived at the tomb, the large stone had been moved from the entrance, and the body was not there! Mary Magdalene was greatly troubled by this. Her initial thoughts were not that Jesus had rose from the dead, but that someone had taken and/or moved the body. She is overcome with worry and grief, and begins to cry.

John 20:11-18

Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Mark 16:9

“When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.”

Mary was rescued from the ruin of demon possession. God doesn't avoid you because of your past – He loves you – and no matter what you have done, He wants to save you from your past!

The third hero on our list today is *The Samaritan Woman*, and we will see that:

God abides with sinners to rescue them.

The account of Jesus meeting the Samaritan Woman is in John 4 (Turn to John 4). Rahab was honored by being in the Messianic line, Mary Magdalene was honored by being the first person Jesus appeared to after His resurrection, and the Samaritan Woman had the honor of being the first person that Jesus revealed His identity as the long-awaited Messiah.

One of the criticisms the religious leaders had of Jesus was that He was “...This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Luke 15:2, or “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners.’” Matt. 11:19, or when Jesus went to Zacchaeus' home, they said, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” Luke 19:7

Because of their tremendous pride and their extensive insecurity, they hated Jesus for this. Jesus was popular with the people because He loved them and treated them with respect. In the corrupted minds of the religious leaders, a religious person shouldn't associate with sinners or with those who aren't knowledgeable about the things of God. They were arrogant and viewed others with disdain.

But Jesus was cut from a different cloth. He didn't follow the social rules that separated people by their race, gender, nationality, religion, or economic status, and His meeting with the Samaritan Woman was the ultimate expression of His love for those whom even His own disciples hated.

Matt. 9:12-13

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

In John 4, starting in vs. 4, we are told that instead of avoiding the region of Samaria, which was the common Jewish practice, it says He "had to go through Samaria." (vs. 4). He stopped at a town named *Sychar*, which held great historical significance for the Jewish people because this was the plot of land that Jacob had bought when he first settled in the Promised Land. There was a well there that provided clean, cold water for over 2,000 years, and this was the location where Jesus met this woman.

Jesus began their conversation by asking her for a drink. She had come to the well in the middle of the day. This reveals something about this woman. Normally, since getting water out of a deep well was strenuous work, everyone would get their water from the well in the morning while it was still cool. But probably due to this woman's immoral lifestyle, she went to the well when nobody else would be there. She could get the water for her household in peace, without being ridiculed, stared at, and talked about by the other women getting water. But on this day, Jesus was waiting...for her. The fact that He was a Jew, a man, and a Rabbi, caused her to be very surprised that He would even talk to her! But she was assuming Jesus was like all the other's she had known over the years.

Their discussion quickly merged from physical water to spiritual water. Jesus tells her that He has “living water” (vs. 10). Naturally, she takes the bait...living water means I don’t have to come here everyday and draw water from this deep well! She says to Jesus, *‘Yea, give me some of your water!’*

Jesus then gets personal – He takes the conversation to a very real and painful place for her. He tells her to go and get her husband. Her personal life had made her an outcast – so much of an outcast that she didn’t dare go to the well with the other women.

Sometimes, we think that we can hide our sins from God. But we can’t keep any secrets from God – He knows everything about us – and still He wants us to come to Him and believe in Him! He still wants to be with us!

Well, the woman admits that she doesn’t have a husband (vs. 17).

Now this was a very cautious and ambiguous admission. It didn’t reveal the whole story – but Jesus already knew the whole story – and He goes on to tell her: Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” (vs. 17-18).

I love her next statement...you can hear the fear and uncertainty in her voice...she has just been caught...correctly identified in her sin and her failures. She replies, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.” (vs. 19). Naturally, she changed the topic to a popular spiritual debate concerning the proper place to worship. You know the popular advice that if you want to avoid getting into an argument, never talk about politics or religion...well, the conversation with Jesus was so uncomfortable that she decides religion and politics would be a safer topic!

She was not only trying to change the conversation from the uncomfortable, personal nature of it, but she probably was sincere in wanting an answer. After all, here was a Rabbi before her – He was unconventional since He was even talking with her in the first place – and beyond that, He seemed to be not only a Rabbi but a

prophet who knew things beyond normal human ability...maybe He can answer this one! After all, this debate was one of the wedges that contributed to the great hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans.

But Jesus not only answers the question, but brings it back to her own world. In His answer He tells her a few things. **First**, the location of worship is not of great importance (vs. 21). **Second**, the religious tradition of the Samaritans was wrong (vs. 22). **Third**, He speaks of the liberation that the Messiah would bring where true worshipers of God will worship in “spirit and in truth” (vs. 24).

Now for us, the promise of Messiah might not jump out in Jesus’ answer...but for her, it did. This is why she then says, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am He.” (vs. 25-26)

This is the first time Jesus clearly and explicitly reveals His identity as the Messiah. The only other time Jesus clearly states this truth is before Caiaphas, the High Priest, during the rigged trial that condemned Him to death (Mark 14:61-64). He confessed His identity before His disciples when Peter made his great confession that Jesus was “...the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). But all the other times that the people wanted Him to tell them directly and plainly He was the Messiah, Jesus refused and told them to look at His works to determine this (see John 10:24-25).

This was quite an honor for this woman – the Messiah was talking to her – not condemning her of her sin – and not avoiding the issue either – and most importantly, offering her “living water”.

Application

No sin, no sinner is beyond the forgiveness of God.

Christian...be humble

“The last shall be first, the first shall be last...”
Too many believers are arrogant – somehow see themselves as morally superior – better than really “bad” sinners.

How has Jesus / how has your faith transformed / reformed your life?

All three women were changed by their faith! Rahab became a part of Israel, which would have required repentance from her life as a prostitute. After being healed by Jesus, Mary Magdalene became a disciple...she dedicated her life to serving Christ. The Samaritan woman...left her water pot at the well, and the shame that caused her to go in the middle of the day to the well, she brought up as evidence that she has found the Messiah (John 4:28-29)! Because of her testimony, many in her town believed in Jesus. How is your life different since you put your faith in Christ?

Closing prayer...ABC's of salvation

A = Admit your sins / that you are a sinner

B = Believe in Jesus – that He died for your sins

C = Choose to follow Christ – choose to live for Him