



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

13th October, 2023

Another 'walk-on'...

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.

Joshua 6:25

Why do we tend to think the worst of people? The media encourage us to think there is always a 'real' (and less pleasant!) truth behind a person, from pop-star to politician. Christians are not immune from such 'deconstruction'; -Mary Magdalene was held by the Church to be a 'woman of ill-repute', but there's no Biblical evidence for that. Our 'walk-on' character this weekend has perhaps suffered the same defamation, she is Rahab from Jericho. (Not to be confused with 'Rahab' in the later Old Testament, -symbolic 'label' for Egypt, standing for pride and arrogance.)

Rahab is nearly always referred to in Bible translations as *"...the prostitute"* (or worse!). That may have been true, but the word could also be translated 'innkeeper'. Whatever she did 'on the side' we may just say that she was running a 'B&B' in Jericho where Joshua's two spies stayed (Joshua 2:1). Rahab risked her life to conceal them (v.4, 6), to send the search-party on a false trail (v.4-5, 7) and to let them down by a rope over the town wall (v.15, -she must have help for that!).

Her plea that her faith (v.9-11) and deed should be remembered (v.12-13) was subsequently honoured (Joshua 6:17, 23, 25). Then, like others of our 'walk-ons', she vanishes from the history... until Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25, where her faith, righteousness and courage are remembered.

But there is another mention of her, showing her great significance in Christian history: she is an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). After Jericho was conquered (Joshua 6), and Rahab and her household were spared (v. 23), including her Dad and Mum, brothers and sisters (could she have been a prostitute under the same roof?!), we read that she *"live(d) among the Israelites to this day"* (v.25). Hardly surprising, then, that she married an Israelite man, Salmon. They became parents: *"Salmon the father of Boaz, the father of Obed, ... the father of Jesse, the father of King David"*... the key ancestor of Jesus.

Matthew (writing mainly for Jewish readers) takes the unusual and significant step of including three women amongst the ancestors of Jesus: Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. They share some characteristics: they were female, they were foreign, and in Rahab's case (if the debatable translation -continued in Hebrews and James- is accepted), a 'woman of ill-repute'.

The challenge to Matthew's readers -and us- is to accept that God values, calls, redeems, and uses people -like us?!- who might be seen in a dim light. The Church may have taken judgemental or demeaning views of some, because of gender, race, background, history or some other factor. The miracle of God's redeeming, life-changing grace through Christ ("once-for-all", -so including Rahab) is that *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female..."* (saint or sinner?!). *"... for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed..."* (Galatians 3:28-29).