

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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Running the Race Part 10 Victory By Rayola Kelley



This is the second to the last article in the series on "Running the Race." I think most people will agree no one runs a race to lose it; rather, they run it to win the race and gain the prize. Next month I will address the prize we are to win, but this month I want to talk about victory that awaits the runner who finishes the course. Winning is not always based on the luster of the prize we receive, but on whether we have finished the race. The Apostle Paul talked about the prize. In fact he stated in *Philippians 3:14*, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Notice, he was not pressing to be the winner of all and the best runner, rather he was pressing toward the mark for the prize.

Through the years, we at Gentle Shepherd Ministries have found ourselves in a lot of races. It is easy to start out enthusiastic because you envision the finish line in your mind, but as you encounter rough terrain and what seems like endless obstacles, it is easy to lose enthusiasm, making the race seem like a grave drudgery. However, when a racer encounters obstacles, determination needs to kick in. My main concern has always been the desire to run across the finish line. The truth is runners rarely meander across the finish line for they often are forced to make a mad dash to the line even though it appears they are void of any strength

to carry them.

Last month I talked about being missionaries in America. This seems like a strange concept to many Christians because we have so many churches in America; therefore, why would there be any real need for missionaries? However, I was challenged by this very concept early in my Christian walk.

In 1985 a South Korean singing group came to our community church. Their presentation was very Gospel centered. I will never forget the statement the overseer of the group made, "You sent us missionaries in the past for which we are grateful, but now we send you missionaries." At the time his statement went into my innermost being. My thought was, "What do they know that we as Christians, as the church in America, are failing to see?"

A couple of years ago Jeannette and I were talking to a missionary from Mexico. Her husband had been a pastor at a local church here before they went into missions. We were sharing how God called us to America to be missionaries. I will never forget her response, "Oh, you poor dears."

I understood her statement. The term that is often used to describe America is "Gospel hardened." In America we may have many churches and much religion, but it does not mean that Christianity (saved souls) is the fruit of these institutions and activities. Buildings can prove lifeless, institutions political, and activities missing the true mark of godly service.

I must admit, working in this mission field has revealed, for the most part, that Americans have not been and are not interested in the Gospel message. To be honest, they are not desperate enough in their plight to see a need to really consider God, and sadly, it seems that some of the visible church in America is not all that interested in the Gospel because some of the preachers are not even bothering to preach it. To me this is a great affront to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul made certain statements such as, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (*1 Corinthians 2:2*); "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (*1 Corinthians 9:16*); "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (*Romans 10:14-15*)!

The Bible is clear the church's commission is to preach the Gospel and to make followers of Christ. But, what is the Gospel? The Apostle Paul summarized it in *1 Corinthians 15:1-4*, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

It is clear what the Gospel message is. Notice it is a message that much be preached. Preaching is the means for the Holy Spirit to awaken people to their sin and stir them up to respond to the message in repentance. The Apostle Paul also instructed the Corinthians to keep the message in their memory. One of the main instructions throughout the Bible is to remember, but what do we need to remember about the Gospel and why? The Apostle Peter gives us this insight in regard to those who are barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, "But he that lacked these

things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins (2 Peter 1:9).

The thing that is most forgotten or overlooked is why we need to be saved in the first place. We as believers can become so caught up in what we are doing for the Lord that we have a tendency to forget what He needed to do on our behalf and what He needs to continue to do in us to ensure we are a fit vessel for His use. The truth is we have a terrible sin problem that separates us from our Holy God. There can be no reconciliation with the Holy God until sin is properly dealt with. Note, the first aspect of the Gospel is that Christ died for our sins. God addressed our sins through Christ's death on the cross. We need to remember our wretched beginnings to appreciate what the Lord has done for us (justified us through His blood), to keep in perspective what is He doing for us now (sanctifying us through His Spirit), and what He will do for us in the future (bring us to glory with Him). In justification He took away our sin, in sanctification He continues to address our sin nature and its fruits, and in glorification He will bring us into a state of perfection.

This brings me to the reason America is somewhat "Gospel hardened." I admit I struggled with why many Americans seemed indifferent and bored towards the Gospel; that is, until a missionary finally provided me with the cause of such a state. He stated that America is "Gospel hardened" because sin has been compromised as to its seriousness, and in some cases completely deleted from the message of the Gospel. Without the harsh reality of sin, the "good news" has no real validity because there is no need to be saved. Without the awareness of sin there is no conviction of it as the Holy Spirit illuminates the real state of man, and no stirring on the part of man to flee from the wrath to come upon all disobedience (sin). Without the knowledge of sin, there is no need to hear and respond to the good news of the Gospel, which has to do with salvation.

Meditate on this reality. God gave the law to show man he was a transgressor, but much of the preaching today is all about man feeling

good about himself, and not seeing the nature of his lost, damned state (*Romans 3:20*). God sent His Son so the cloak of sin could be taken away and man would see his need to be saved, but it seems much of the church in America is providing a religious cloak comprised of religious piety, good works and dead-letter doctrine so that sin can be once again covered up by some type of outward reformation of religion and not inward transformation which comes from the born again experience (*Matthew 22:8-14; John 3:5; 15:22*). Jesus allowed Himself to be lifted up on the cross to draw all men to Himself as a means to save them from the slavery and judgment of spiritual death, but now in our politically correct cesspool of "everything goes" even in the religious environment, He has been adjusted to fit in every worldly arena, to hold every worldly title, to become just like everyone else, "one of the guys," "a good guy," "the man upstairs," "a sugar daddy," "Papa (or "Daddy"), a "special Santa Claus" or the "Great Spirit" that is here to do our bidding, ever being presented according to the popular preferences of the world, but never as God Incarnate who came to die on the cross for wretched mankind, men and women who stand under a death sentence, doomed to a hellish existence for eternity (*John 12:32*).

The preaching of the Gospel is intended to wake people up to their spiritual plight, to show them that they are walking towards an abyss of destruction, foolishly dangling on the edge of hell fire and damnation. It is meant to cause them to feel the fires of hell, taste the foulness of it, hear the gnashing of the teeth of lost souls, and to know how thirsty, how alone, how desperate they are in their lost, wandering state so the hearer will flee the pending judgment, and receive the love, mercy, grace, and salvation of the Lord.

I say all of this because the knowledge of my lost, hopeless condition of sin is what brought me to the foot of the cross of Christ seeking forgiveness and salvation from my terrible plight. Granted, no real preaching of hell brought me there for I never heard it, no threats of damnation brought me there because I already

felt my hopeless state weighing heavily on my soul, but when Jesus was finally offered to me my inward knowledge of sin and the great, tormenting vacuum of my soul caused me to see Jesus as the only real solution to my plight. In my knowledge of sin, I saw the love of God reaching out to me. In my awareness of the emptiness of my soul, I sensed the faithfulness and grace of God drawing me. In my sickness and weariness of spirit, I heard the invitation of the Lord to come to Him.

Through the years I have talked, shared, written and preached about sin because most people do not believe they need to be saved. They see themselves as having "some good" in them, making them salvageable at some point. They see salvation as a merit system where it is about association with religion or a particular church, or to "good works," where their so-called "goodness" will surely outweigh the bad, and even if it doesn't God will surely grade them on a curve because at least they tried. But, Scripture is clear, man is totally one-hundred percent lost. There is no good thing in his flesh and his best is nothing more than filthy rags (*Isaiah 64:6; Romans 7:18*). There is nothing worth salvaging in man: there is nothing in him that is acceptable to heaven. Probably the best statement to summarize the delusion that keeps many from seeing their plight and need for salvation is, "It is easy to get lost people saved, but what is hard is getting them lost in the first place." If a person does not see that he or she is totally lost, why would he or she see a need to be saved?

This brings me to the problem confronting the church in America. Sadly, some of the church possesses a very Laodicean attitude which is described in *Revelation 3:17*, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..." It was clear this church was delusional about its real state. It saw itself as having no real needs, but in its delusional state here comes Jesus' indictment against it, "...and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The first problem is that it seems that much of the American Church is promoting another Jesus,

another gospel and another spirit (2 *Corinthians* 11:3-5). Jesus is not one of the “guys” and He did not become man to wear different titles so the world will accept Him. This great affront against the character of Jesus has rendered Him to human status as many try to make Him presentable to the world, changing His glory by bringing Him down from the lofty height of being Holy God. Jesus has never changed, but I realize that to present a watered-down gospel, the character, nature, and work of Jesus would have to be watered down as well (*Hebrews* 13:5).

Instead of the Gospel being about Christ being lifted up on the cross to address everyone’s sin, it has become man-centered where it is about God wanting man to receive His many blessings. At best the popular gospels being presented in churches simply tack Jesus onto the message. These gospels emphasize how God loves us and wants us to be happy, and all we have to do is intellectually “accept” Him and we can go merrily on our way and pursue happiness in this present world. There is no mention of such a message being believed in the heart to ensure inward transformation, and assimilated into one’s life through discipleship and obedience (*Matthew* 16:24-25; *Romans* 10:9-10; 12:1-2). Such a gospel is what I called the *cheap grace gospel* that does not require genuine faith to be present, but there is also the *Social Gospel* that promotes the goodness of man in relationship to making the world a better place. Another gospel that has been gaining popularity for the last three decades due to the New Age influence is the *Enlightened, Gnostic Gospel* that takes on various forms. This gospel is where you just need to “realize the Christ within you.” As you become more enlightened as to the fact you are a little “Christ” or a little “god,” you can work your way to immortality, and we cannot forget the *Positive Confession Gospel*, where people can confess themselves into some spiritual reality where they can control events and situations which involve occult practices. Then there is *Universalism*. Promoted by the bestselling fiction book and now movie, “The Shack,” Universalism is where everyone is

saved and each of us is going to live happily ever after in some existence that will certainly be one big endless party. You must wonder how many Americans, like the people of Judah, during Jerusalem’s third and final fall to Babylon, will be partying while destruction surrounds them, casting bets as to when their society will finally fall. This is just a couple examples of the different gospels that have bombarded Americans with a quasi-religious state that leave churches powerless, many Christians frustrated because they do not see any real victory, and many attendees still lost.

This brings me back to a “Gospel hardened America.” When you consider the array of gospels that are being presented to the ignorant, the vulnerable, and the seeking, why should people settle for the idea that there is one correct gospel, especially when they can choose a gospel that suits their particular palates and preferences? The problem is the more people resist the true Gospel message the harder their hearts can become towards it, making them more prone to accept a pseudo gospel.

For example, why accept a gospel that challenges and makes one feel uncomfortable, when there is a feel-good gospel being promoted? Why walk by faith towards God into the unknown when you believe you can control God by arm-wrestling Him to the ground in submission and surrender by using promises in Scriptures that have been twisted to fit a perverted narrative? Why accept the simplicity found in Christ when you can become “enlightened” enough to become a “Christ” or “god” over your small kingdom? Why accept the concept of a narrow way when Universalism is once again growing in popularity and is proving to be the latest fad (*Matthew* 7:13-14)? And, keep in mind there are many other gospels being presented out there I have not mentioned.

Not only do we contend with the different gospels flooding America, we also contend with an array of Bible versions that water down who God is, the real work of redemption, the Gospel, and salvation, by adjusting Scriptures according to wicked agendas, changing the meaning of certain words and Scriptures to comply with a

false narrative, and do away with anything controversial and not politically correct. *Second Timothy* 3:16-17 states, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” The Word is to bring forth perfection in us that will be manifested in good works. *Hebrews* 6:9 talks about things accompanying salvation, showing that much like true repentance, there are fruits that accompany salvation. But, if you don’t agree with what my particular Bible says about a certain issue, you can go to another so-called “version” which waters down or changes the intent of the subject to explain it away or define it according to another interpretation on the matter, or leaves that particular verse, or verses, out altogether. The tragedy with all of these versions is that they undermine the concept that there is only one real standard of truth by which everyone will be judged accordingly.

False gospels and the many non-inspired “versions” of the Bible have definitely added to the fact that whether we want to admit it or not, Americans are suffering a spiritual drought because the pure Word of God is not being preached, taught, and upheld as the absolute standard of truth in some of the Church (*Amos* 8:11-12).

It is clear by the lack of serious runners in the harvest field, that the preaching of the Gospel is not the main priority of some preachers, discipling new converts—the serious call of the church, upholding a vision for the lost—the heart of the church, maintaining the urgency for the lost—the fire of the church, and the result is that the church is failing its commission. There are very few victories to be claimed and it appears only a remnant is preparing to cross the finish line to claim the prize. As Christians do we dare ignore some of the Scriptural warnings about a lukewarm state that hides behind a veneer of religion, “*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*” (*Luke* 21:36); “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,*

shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Does America need missionaries? Does some or much of the church need to return to its first love in repentance to renew its vision, and do Christians need to be reminded of why they are here—to pick up the torch of the Gospel and run the race with it lifted high through this present age with one goal, to cross the finish line for the glory of God, and praying others will surely follow suit. †

COMMENTS

“Thanks for the encouraging and challenging March newsletter! It is amazing how you both don’t talk to one another about your articles, but the Lord gives you what He wants you to write as they always intertwine with the same message. Enjoyed Rayola’s missionary stories and how the churches have lost their love for souls. We should be sober about what state the church is in and be on our faces asking God to touch His people once again. Revival starts with us Christians individually through self-denial of having life on our terms, daily dethroning pride, deciding to seek and follow Jesus by faith and obedience to the truth of His Word. Jeannette your article on being a courageous Christian was just great. I never thought about the fact that the LORD will “strengthen” our hearts after we are of “good courage” and have “waited on the LORD” until I read your article. I loved how you talked about the different examples of people in the Bible who displayed valiant faith and the different types of courage. It certainly does take courage to truly humble ourselves, wait on His presence and to be broken in true repentance of what He shows us about ourselves and walk out in obedience to what is right. Thanks so much!” - ID

[Regarding Rayola’s audio message on Joseph, March 3] “Very anointed, thanks! Never saw all that. She has abundant wisdom!” - SC

THE COURAGEOUS CHRISTIAN

Part Two

By Jeannette Haley

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” – 1 John 4:18

Several different aspects of courage, along with some examples from Scripture, were touched on in the first article on this subject. We need to keep in mind that just because a person possesses exemplary courage to do great achievements for God, country and others doesn’t mean that he or she is never fearful or afraid. Courage is doing what is right, or what needs to be done in any given circumstance in spite of fear. Everyone has certain normal fears depending on the person and his or her makeup. For example, some of the things people fear are flying, fire, heights, drowning, snakes, bugs, animals, death, ghosts and so forth, but I don’t think that fearing your wife is going to force you to spend an evening attending Pucini’s 1896 Opera, La Boheme is in the same category—neither is fearing that your favorite team may not win the Super Bowl.

All kidding aside, both history and the Bible contain a “gold mine” of examples of courageous people; and, some of them that I have chosen for this article may surprise you. The first person we are going to look at exemplifies the courage of character. Her story is found in *Genesis chapters 24-29*. This beautiful woman was chosen, called, prepared and ordained by God. In *Genesis 24:15, 16* she is introduced as the daughter of Abraham’s brother, Nahor. We are told that she was fair to look upon, and morally pure. One wonders if the same thing could be said about most of the young, pretty girls in our corrupt day and age. It takes strength and courage of character to keep oneself morally pure and unspotted from the world. Rebekah is a type (representation) of the Church that Jesus is returning for. Abraham’s servant is a type of the Holy Spirit who was sent to secure the bride for the Father’s Son.

The next thing we read about Rebekah is that she was sensitive to the needs of others and in this case the weary, thirsty Eliezer and his camels. Her kind words and actions displayed the virtues of humility, honor, diligence, compassion, kindness, and hospitality all of which was not only recorded in detail once, but twice as the servant recounted every detail to her family. Rebekah was definitely not an immature, flighty, silly, ignorant or arrogant young woman. For her to draw water out of a well that could have been up to 100 feet deep to satisfy the thirst of ten camels, Abraham’s servant, and the men who traveled with him, revealed her servant’s heart. A thirsty camel can drink up to ten gallons of water. The water jars in those times could hold up to three gallons of water, and weighed thirty pounds. This was quite a test, but the uncomplaining Rebekah passed with flying colors.



For Rebekah to decide to leave her family behind and travel with this stranger for over 500 miles to marry his master’s son, whom she had never met, indicates a woman of incredible faith and courage. We must remember that when she waved goodbye to her family, she knew she would probably never see them again. Before she and her nurse and damsels mounted the camels to begin the long, slow journey, a great prophecy came forth from her family. “*And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which*

hate them” Genesis 24:60. We know that this prophecy has been, is, and will be, fulfilled, not only for the nation of Israel, but in the future earthly reign of King Jesus. Even though this prophecy was personally to Rebekah, it applied to the nation of Israel, and can also be applicable to the Church that Jesus is building.

After twenty years Rebekah conceived, *“And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger”* Genesis 25:22, 23. Again we see the strong, godly character of Rebekah as she went to inquire of the LORD, and He answered with this second prophecy given to her, which, by faith and belief, directed the course of her life. Then in *Genesis 26:34, 35* we read of Esau’s disregard for the will of both God and his parents by marrying pagan wives, thus clearly demonstrating how he not only despised his birthright (*Genesis 25:32-34*), but had no respect or regard for the lineage of the Promised One yet to come. This story of the twins can be compared to the “twins” of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism—the former struggling to maintain the purity of the Gospel, and the other (Esau) embracing different facets of Babylonian paganism.

After the passing of time, when Isaac was old and his eyes were blind, he decided it was time to pass on the blessing. Neglecting to confer with his wife about his decision, he called in his favorite son, Esau. Instead of pronouncing the blessing on Esau at that moment, however, Isaac’s appetite craved fleshly satisfaction for venison, so he sent Esau away to get it and prepare it for him. Rebekah overheard what was going to take place, and then—poof! She turned into a lying witch, right? Isn’t that what most of us have been taught? So much for the God-chosen, upright Rebekah—her courage of character just flew out the window on her broom. And, to make matters worse, she even enlisted Jacob in on

her scheme to secure the blessing of the *birthright*, which Esau despised and sold to Jacob for a bowl of lentil soup. Rebekah’s courage to take fast action was based on prophecies to fulfill God’s will, not her husband’s will, concerning the precious lineage of our LORD Jesus Christ. So, was she really a wicked, conniving wife?

Consider this: If Rebekah’s quick thinking had not secured the blessing of the birthright for Jacob, who was God’s choice, then the Lord would most likely have killed Esau just as He did Judah’s two sons whose mother was a Canaanite. (See *Genesis 38*.) Courage of character is built into a believer who knows how to wait on the LORD for His eternal perspective, whose heart is strengthened because of that perspective, and who acts according to God’s will in a matter for His glory. Unless our unregenerate worldview, which is established through *“philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”* *Colossians 2:7b* is changed by the Holy Spirit, then we will judge after the natural man that *“receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* *1 Corinthians 2:14.* *“We ought to obey God rather than men”* *Acts 5:29.* And, that takes courage of character!

Whenever we have had the opportunity to work with young people we always present the Christian life in the light of challenge, because they are quick to respond. Christianity is not about sleepwalking through fields of daisies, but about being a good soldier in the army of God. Real Christianity is “active duty” not passive pussyfooting around problems, trials, tribulations, and challenges. As soldiers of the cross we are in a daily battle with the world, the flesh and the devil, and if we are truly about our Father’s business, there will always be challenges. I fear we present Christianity these days as sort of a softy, cozy, feel-good subculture that guarantees you will go to heaven someday after you go out and live life on your terms. Nothing is farther from the truth, and the Bible does not teach that *“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto*

life, and few there be that find it” *Matthew 7:14.*

Our next hero of the faith played a very important part in the plan of God concerning the Messiah. Her story is found in *Genesis 38* and her name is Tamar. Judah took to himself a Canaanite woman to wife who was the daughter of a man named Shuah, which means “pit.” I just have to say, this long season of Judah’s life was definitely the “pits.” First, he left his brethren and struck out on his own. For what reason we are not told, but the application is clear to the Christian who forsakes the company and fellowship of other believers, and becomes unevenly yoked with an unbeliever. Satan is the supreme “sniper” who loves to pick off wandering sheep, and it appears that Judah was just such a target.

Judah’s wife bore him three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. When Er was grown, Judah took a wife for him whose name was Tamar. However, Er *“was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him”* *Genesis 38:7b.* As was the custom of that day, Judah was responsible to give the bereaved widow his next-born son, Onan, in order to rise up seed for Er, which he did. But, Onan rebelled at this which *“displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also”* vs. 10. Then, Judah told Tamar to stay at her father’s house until his third son, Shelah, was grown, but Judah was fearful that she was a “jinx” and that his third son would also die, so he conveniently “forgot” to fulfill his promise. Therefore, Tamara disguised herself as a harlot, had an encounter with Judah who gave her his signet, bracelets, and staff for a pledge, and wisely concealed those items until the time came to prove who the father was of her unborn twins.

When Judah was told that Tamar was pregnant, he was indignant and wanted to burn her to death; that is, until she brought forth his signet, bracelets, and staff which Judah acknowledged as belonging to him. Then he said, *She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son”* vs. 26. Thus we see that although the Lord killed two of Judah’s sons by the Canaanite woman, He gave him two sons by Tamar, the Hebrew woman—

the woman who acted in faith with the courage to challenge Judah, even in the face of death, to undo Judah's sin of unbelief and omission in order to ensure, protect, and maintain the Messianic lineage (See *Matthew 1:3*). Tamar is the ancestress of most of the tribe of Judah, and in particular the house of David.

Tamara was not a prostitute or an immoral woman as some would have us to believe. She was a righteous, meek, patient, and obedient woman who waited for years to fulfill the requirements for Judah's legacy. Like Rebekah, she used her wits in order to carry out God's will in spite of the obstacles and challenges before her. Her courage to challenge should be a wakeup call for today's lukewarm, "politically correct," half-committed, sleepy Christian when it comes to challenging sin, error, heresy, compromise, demonic activity, worldliness, unscriptural practices, and unholy living in the church, and in their own lives as well. We need to be about our Father's business, and when we wait upon Him and step out in courage as ambassadors for Christ, He will give our hearts the courage we need to challenge and confront for righteousness sake.

Another God-fearing woman in Jesus' genealogy is Rahab "the harlot", an Amorite woman who lived in Jericho and who believed everything she had heard about the God of Israel, His power, might and miracles. When the Jewish spies entered Jericho, she took her life in her hands by hiding them and helping them to escape the city, but not before she made them swear that they would spare her and her family when Joshua and his army besieged it.

Rahab had the courage of compassion. She had compassion on the spies, compassion on her family, and the faith and power of that courage saved her and her loved ones. The courage of compassion is love in action. This type of love gives of itself without reservation, enters in with the plight of others, and is self-sacrificing. Rahab is mentioned three times in the New Testament, *Matthew 1:5*, *Hebrews 11:31*, and *James 2:25*. She believed with the heart (*Romans 10:9, 10*), confessed with the mouth, and acted on her profession at the risk of

her life.

Rahab married Salmon, the son of Judah's tribal leader and from their union would come their son Boaz, a faithful man of God who married Ruth. Their son Obed became the father of Jesse, the father of King David, and out of his descendants would come the Savior of all mankind, the Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful that a former harlot of Canaan would become what every woman of Israel longed to be—a mother in the line of the Messiah. Rahab herself experienced the messianic hope in a personal way, finding deliverance from a pagan culture and spiritual deliverance as well through God's mercy. Never forget, God looks at the heart.

In the *Book of Judges, chapter 4* we find an exceptional example of the courage of confidence in Deborah, the fourth judge of Israel. The first thing we read about Deborah is that she was a prophetess. This means that she was a chosen vessel of God to proclaim His truth, wisdom, and word for the people. She was also a wife and the judge of Israel, or authority in Israel. *Judges 4:5* paints an interesting picture for us. It reads, "*And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim; and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.*"

One day "*she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand*" vs. 6. Talk about courage of confidence! The situation was grim for Israel because the LORD had sold Israel into the hand of Jabin, the king of Canaan, which reigned in Hazor. The captain of his host was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentes. The Bible records that Israel had no weapons, but Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron, and he mightily oppressed the children of Israel for twenty years.

Barak was a man of faith in God's word through Deborah. He had

no problem with her gender, and knew that she was a true prophet of God. He also knew that to go up against such a well-equipped, powerful enemy was suicide unless the LORD's presence was with him. "*And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go*" vs. 8. Deborah responded, "*I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.*" Rayola Kelley, in her Hebrews Bible Study wrote, "Barak receives a lot of criticism for not going into battle alone, yet he is accredited as a man of faith that subdued a kingdom. It was clear that Barak trusted Deborah's faith and calling. He did not want to go into battle without the prophetess. King David never went into a battle without first inquiring of the Lord. Neither Deborah nor Barak took the credit for the victory. They gave it to the Lord. Once again Barak was not on some pride trip touting his accomplishments because he was the man. He not only recognized the advantage of having a prophetess with him, but the reality that it was the Lord who won the real victory."

Deborah's confidence in the LORD underscored her great courage, as well as the brave and courageous Jael who killed Sisera, a woman whom Deborah "blessed above women" in her song of victory and praise. (See *Judges 5*.) After this great victory that the LORD gave to Israel, they enjoyed peace for forty years. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harosheth_Haggoyim. Deborah is one of seven Old Testament prophetesses whose words are recorded in Scripture.

The Bible describes Abigail as "*a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance*" *1 Samuel 25:3b*. Abigail's quick thinking and actions averted death, destruction and disaster. It took great courage of commitment (to God and righteousness) for Abigail to go against Nabal's foolish refusal to help David and his men, and go forth to meet King David and his men, who were armed for war and determined to destroy Nabal and all that he had. Humbly and wisely she hurried to him, with much provision,

and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground. And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid" 1 Samuel 25:23, 24. Then she prophesied to David all that the LORD would fulfill in his life (vs. 28-31.) We know that soon afterwards the LORD smote Nabal and he died. Then David sent to take her for his wife. Her humility continued to shine through her as "she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord" vs. 41. Abigail knew that returning evil for good (which her husband did) was totally displeasing to God, and would bring evil upon her household. ("Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house" Proverbs 17:13.)

Abigail's righteous actions are a beacon of light and hope to Christian women who live in the dark shadows of abusive physical and mental oppression. God never condones masculine dominance over women in any situation, even though most of the world, including many individuals and certain churches in Christendom, still continue in this wickedness. Professor Kathryn Bushnell wrote concerning Abigail, "She knew her husband was a foolish and worthless man, and frankly said so. She did not even consult him when she took 'two hundred loaves and two bottles of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched corn, a hundred clusters of grapes, and two hundred cakes of figs,' and gave them to David, knowing full well that her husband had just refused to give David anything. Under ordinary conditions, had she had a worthy husband, she would not have done this. Nabal did not measure up to the occasion, and his masculinity counted for nothing, as to the authority over a wife wiser than himself. The whole Bible story goes to show that Abigail did the right and prudent thing in going against what she well knew was her husband's will, to do what she could not have done with his knowledge. She showed moral courage. She averted a dire calamity, David praised her for it, and Scripture

shows its approval,--for, 'It came to pass that about ten days after, the Lord smote Nabal that he died.'" (God's Word to Women, pg. 150).

In conclusion, women whose faith and lives demonstrate the courage of Christlikeness can be seen in Ruth, who left everything behind to follow Naomi and serve her God; Hannah whose prayer, prophecy, and personal sacrifice shine as precious gems, forever recorded in 1 Samuel 2; and the humble, godly virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose beautiful praise in the Holy Spirit lifts the souls of weary pilgrims and sojourners seeking for, and looking beyond this world of woe to the glorious Kingdom of the Great God and King.

May we all find the courage to endure to the end as we seek to draw near to Him, who promised, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" John 15:10. †

GSM QUOTABLES

Rayola Kelley: "When people get up and try to describe God and it doesn't end in worship, it proves they don't know Him. It's an intellectual understanding that doesn't have any life in it...it's dead letter. Worship is not an emotional exercise, rather it's living because the Spirit of God will bring us to that place of complete adoration of who He is."

"What God is going to defend is not your reputation—it is the TRUTH! It doesn't matter what people think of you—what matters is the truth [Concerning The Shack] "A spiritual man is tuned into heaven and knows how to get a hold of heaven in prayer. The Spirit of God leads us to God. Any other spirit leads you off into another reality in 'noo-noo land.'"

"We need to come under the yoke with God, and walk in step with the LORD or you fail to be victorious."

God is so busy working on us that He can't work through us."

"Our worldview has been changed by Hollywood and the world."

Carrie Seaney: "You can never figure things out when you are playing a game because you have to delude yourself first."

MORE COMMENTS

"I read The Shack several years ago, and felt uncomfortable all the way through it! Destroyed it in the end." - UK

"I really enjoyed your last article. So many are complacent. Seems so many are not standing up for the Lord. I did order the book "Muddy Waters" from Lighthouse Pub." - BC

"Thanks, Ladies, for yet another jam-packed smorgasbord of TRUTH! Although it probably was not your intent, and it may just be MY perception, it seemed that both of your lead articles meshed together so beautifully, and formed the word APATHY in my mind! Mission-mindedness has gone the way of oblivion practically, and courage has followed right along with it. Where are the Warriors of His Word? Why do Believers think they can sit back on their past laurels [and on their hands!], and not continue on steadfast in His Word and calling in their life. They've been duped into being apathetic ingrates. They have departed from their first Love. Thanks for addressing these issues so spectacularly, and building my faith with your words!" - FL

"Just finished reading it. [March NL.] Precise and sobering. Well done good and faithful servants. Thank you for speaking the truth. It certainly should spur one on for the glory of God. I know it did me!" - WA

"GOD has been calling America to repentance for a long time. The country as a whole has ignored Him. Time is about up and judgment is coming." - AK

"Sure wish and hope and pray someone would start speaking the truth about the end times. Matt.24, etc. so people would be prepared for tribulation." - WA

"This [Conquer Series] is what breaks my heart. On the surface it looks really good...but as I started looking closer Promise Keepers is tied to this. That sent up a big flag for me. This is just ANOTHER avenue that the enemy slips in deceit. It appears to have a hint of godliness but no doubt puts "its spin" of deception throughout to profit monetarily and lead our men into easy believism." - WA

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN?

Q: What does it mean when the Apostle Paul said in *1 Corinthians 9:22b*, “I am made all things to all men, that I might be all means save some?”

A: The Apostle Paul made this statement in light of sharing the Gospel. He confirmed this in *1 Corinthians 9:23a* when he stated, “And this I do for the gospel’s sake.” When you read the Scriptures before *1 Corinthians 9:22*, the apostle stated in *9:19*, that he made himself a servant to all that he might gain the more, and in *9:20* he stated that he became as a Jew that he might gain the Jews, and he subjected himself to the law so that he might gain those who are under it, and that to those who were not under the law, he revealed that he was free from the law so that he might gain them (*9:21*).

We see these practices in the life of Paul when you read the book of *Acts*. He used his Jewish roots, even to the point of fulfilling purification rights to reach the Jews with the Gospel, as well as his citizenship as a Roman to reach the Gentiles (*Acts 13:1-5; 21:21-39; 22:6-30*). As you study Paul’s approach to others with the Gospel in the book of *Acts*, you will find that he gave his testimony five times, and each time his testimony was geared towards the group he was speaking to. Paul’s example shows us that for the sake of the Gospel he was willing to become a servant of all. In other words, he was not a servant to all, but a servant of all. He did not serve man’s whims or abide by man’s rules or ideas because he was a true servant to the Lord of lords. As the Lord’s representative and servant, Paul was willing to find places where he could identify and agree with a person regardless of his or her background in order to point him or her to his or her need of salvation.

The important aspect of Paul’s example was that he went as far as he could without compromising his testimony and walk. In other words, he did not come into agreement with wrong spirits, conduct himself in unbecoming ways, or become involved

in questionable practices that would end in him becoming a stumbling-block to others (*1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 10:17-33; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18*). It is clear that the Apostle Paul did not become “one of the guys” to win people to Christ; rather, he found a place of agreement so that he could use it as an opportunity to point individuals to Christ.

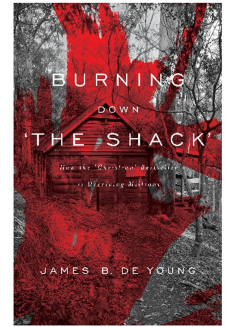
I say this because there are those who are using Paul’s words to act like, live like, and conduct themselves as the world in order to supposedly “win” people to Christ, when in reality they are simply hiding their own worldliness and rebellion, while excusing the fact they are living like the devil. However, those who are seeking to be saved from the world will see such attempts as hypocritical, which will become a stumbling block to them, rather than an attraction.

As Christians we are to attract the seeking soul to Jesus and that simply means lifting Him up in sincerity. Those seeking a real solution to the hopelessness that abounds are looking for the real thing, not someone who can be made into “one of the guys.” They are seeking the great physician because their soul is heavy laden with sin, guilt, and hopelessness. They are seeking light to penetrate the darkness created by their spiritual state. They are seeking a reality of God that will bring sanity to their insane worlds.

The Apostle Paul always wore his Christianity with great honor and dignity. He considered himself an ambassador of Christ inviting the lost, poor, hungry, and thirsty to become citizens of the kingdom of God (*2 Corinthians 5:19-20*). Clearly, he was not representing himself nor was it really his responsibility to get people saved. (*John 6:44*.) All he could do was find the key, the open door, and the opportunity to point people to Jesus, while giving the Holy Spirit the opportunity to bring conviction to lost souls, turning the key of their hearts toward repentance and salvation, while opening the door for them to hear the glorious invitation of Jesus Christ in *John 7:37-38*, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” †

WARNING TO CHRISTIANS:

The Shack is Universal Reconciliation, not biblical Christianity. We recommend the book, *Burning Down The Shack, How the ‘Christian’ Bestseller is Deceiving Millions* by James B. De Young. In *Burning Down the Shack*, De Young, Th.D., a graduate-level professor of Greek and biblical studies for 30



years, shows just how spiritually flimsy *The Shack* truly is, and how its enticing yet false doctrine is stealthily cracking the foundations of countless Christians’ faith—and rotting away their very concept of the true God. With the skill of an investigator and the heart of a counselor, De Young addresses essential issues about biblical doctrine and scriptural truth. Bringing to light a series of troubling questions about *The Shack* and its author, De Young clearly shows how this runaway hit is little more than a runaway from truth.

The Universalists are people who do not want to enter the fold by means of the door which is Christ, but want to allow for people to enter other ways (as if it is up to their broad minded view). It ends up that the Universalists hold to the idea that those rejecting Jesus receive the same benefits as those who accept Him. However Jesus said *Mt. 7:13-15*: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.” Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Jesus said, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (*Luke 13:24*). Strive has the concept to agonize to get in, in other words repentance is a key part of receiving eternal life. Jesus did not teach that all will be saved. *Ps 1:4-6* “The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” †