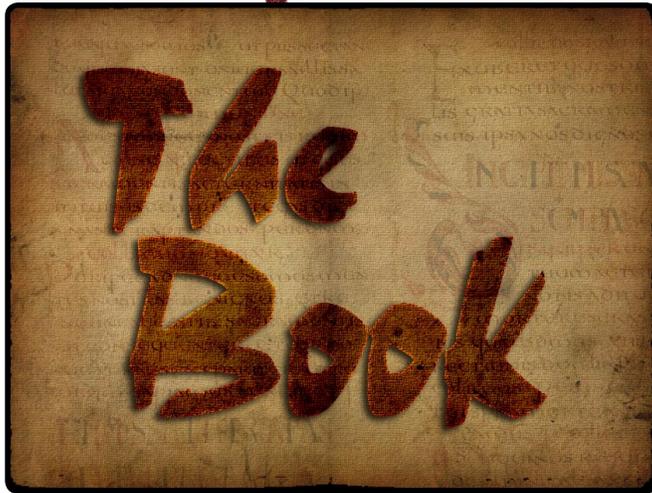


Surprising Things



The most crooked tree
will make timber
for the temple,
if God be pleased
to hew it.

Thomas Fuller

WILLIAM COWPER'S VENERABLE HYMN BEGINS, "Sometimes a light surprises / The Christian while he sings." And a similar statement can be made for the Christian's experience in reading through God's word. Sometimes the page illumines the truth about God in ways both marvelous and disturbing.

One of the more remarkable discoveries made by reading through the Bible is how a perfect, holy God repeatedly uses rather ordinary, imperfect people to accomplish His plan for this earth. In fact, one may deduce from Scripture that it is God's chosen method to employ the most disreputable, conniving, contemptible characters He can find.

Few professions are as low as that of the prostitute, yet one of the surprises discovered in the Bible is that God chose to include one in the family line that would lead directly to a lowly stable in Bethlehem.

GRACE

The time was about 1406 B.C. The Israelites were just wrapping up their forty-year period of

desert exile. It was now time to cross the Jordan and move from the barrenness of Moab into the relative paradise of Canaan. There remained only one small detail. The already ancient city-state of Jericho sat on a plain near the western bank of the Jordan; its destruction would have to be the first real campaign of Joshua's push into the Promised Land.

Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.

Joshua 2:1

In the fortified city was a prostitute and inn-keeper who welcomed strangers of every ilk and nationality. Her house was conveniently situated against the inside of the city wall: convenient for commerce—and convenient for the Israeli spies who would need a fast and private exit from their mission of reconnoitering Jericho for the advancing troops.

Almost immediately their presence in the city was discovered and reported to the king. He demanded that the prostitute Rahab give up her

house guests at once, but she lied, saying that they had already departed the city. This was no harmless falsehood; if she had been found out, she certainly would have been punished under the ancient Code of Hammurabi, which stated “If felons are banded together in an ale-wife’s [prostitute or innkeeper’s] house and she has not haled [them] to the palace, that ale-wife shall be put to death.”

This woman, however, was not only fearless but wise. She had been paying attention to all the news reports of what the Israelites had been accomplishing in the surrounding regions. She knew that their God—the one who carried them to repeated victories—was the one, true God of heaven and earth. She had made the conscious decision to turn her allegiance from the old ways of Canaan to the new ways of Israel. She knew who would win the coming battle.

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.”

Joshua 2:8-9

Rahab struck a bargain with the two Israelites, and, keeping their agreement with her, the spies subsequently returned and spirited Rahab and her family out of the city even while it was being burned to the ground. She was saved, and continued on with the Jews, eventually settling with them.

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the harlot’s house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her.” So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel. They burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold, and articles of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. However, Rahab the harlot and her father’s household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Joshua 6:22-25

Later Rahab, because she was living among the Jews, met a Jewish man and they were wed.

This man’s name was Salmon, of the house of Judah. One of their sons was Boaz, who lived in Bethlehem and became the grandfather of Jesse. Jesse had a young shepherd son named David who became King of Israel—and of his house would be born Joseph, who would take for his wife a young maiden by the name Mary.

Rahab passed from this life to the next not knowing the full extent of the Lord’s grace. In this life she never knew—nor did she dare to dream—that she, a lowly woman of the street, would play a part in the very lineage of the long-awaited Messiah.

Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king... ..Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Matthew 1:5-6a,16

THE SOURCE

It always seems to offend when anyone forms an inaccurate opinion of me based on erroneous information they acquire from someone else. I feel like confronting them, grasping them by the collar, saying, “Here I am! Why didn’t you come directly to the source?”

The Lord God may not be so easily offended as I, but I wonder how He feels when the people of this earth—whether believers or no—try to learn of Him exclusively through second-hand sources. The faithful pastor will have valuable things to say about God—but he is not the source. The commentator or writer may contribute good insights to our understanding of God—but they are not the source. The teacher, evangelist, or friend may add special colors to our picture of how God works among us—but they are not the source.

God says in His word, “Here I am! Come directly to the source!”

continued...

*There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains:
Lose all their guilty stains, lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.*

*The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away:
Wash all my sins away, wash all my sins away;
And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.*

*Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more:
Be saved, to sin no more, be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more.*

*When this poor lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave,
Then in a nobler, sweeter song, I’ll sing Thy power to save:
I’ll sing Thy power to save, I’ll sing Thy power to save;
Then in a nobler, sweeter song, I’ll sing Thy power to save.*

William Cowper