

Mind Over Materialism

by Peter Masters

The sermon explores the theme of prioritizing faith and spiritual values over materialism, illustrated through the story of Rahab.

Duration: 37:43

Scripture: Joshua 2:1

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Faith And Repentance"

Description

This sermon delves into the story of Rahab in the Old Testament, highlighting her transition from a polytheistic, materialistic society to a believer in the one true God. It emphasizes the importance of reasoning, comparing the emptiness of life without God to the blessings and guidance found in a relationship with Him. The sermon encourages repentance, belief in Christ's sacrifice, and trust in His power to transform lives, drawing parallels between Rahab's conversion and the ongoing invitation for people to seek and find God.

Transcript

The subject is mind over materialism, a very straightforward subject really, wonderfully illustrated from this passage in the Old Testament going all the way back to 1400 BC. Well, here are the children of Israel, the Hebrews, in Canaan coming into and through the land and there's much archaeological evidence of their entry into Canaan and we know all about the Amarna letters, for example, in the British Museum where the kings of up to 14 city-states in Canaan appealed to Pharaoh, their overlord, for help against the invading Habiru, the Hebrew peoples, and so there even on the archaeological record is the entry of the people into that land so very long ago. Well, Joshua had succeeded Moses, I'm sure you're all that familiar with the history of the Old Testament people and here they are in Canaan.

God had determined that those who were the inhabitants of Canaan, of those territories, would be pushed out and would be punished because of the grotesque evil in society. It was a polytheistic society believing in numerous, countless gods, not because there was sincere belief even in those gods and idols, but because it was superstitiously believed that all these idols could make people prosperous. Really, it was a form of superstitious materialism.

All people were concerned about were protection from misfortune or enrichment, personal advance and aggrandizement. These were not gods who could be known, of course. These were not gods who were interested, they didn't exist, but who were interested in the reformation of life or a decent society.

These were gods that were invented by human beings to aid and abet and to smile upon every kind of misconduct and greed and violence. God and the whole idea was to superstitiously clutch at something and pay off something in the hope of enrichment and benefit and advance. And the society in those regions in those days was society was as low as it possibly could be, including revolting practices of child sacrifice and the worst conceivable types of fertility rights and so on.

And God had determined to sweep clear the territory. But it would largely be accomplished by the Hebrews and in fact it would largely be accomplished by miracles of God's activity. And here however, Joshua is confronted with the problem of Jericho, the first city to fall and a city that fell not so much by conquest but by divine intervention in a remarkable way.

But Joshua begins by sending two men to spy secretly, go view the land. These were their orders, even Jericho and the regions around. And they went and they came into the city, into a former prostitute's resident, Rahab, who lived in a house, into the wall.

There were many houses built as lean-to's on the great city wall. Jericho was the oldest walled city known to human history. And of course they would take advantage of the stability of the great wall and they would drive heathen shafts for light and windows, though they were not allowed to, into the outer wall at high points and make their roofs upon the wall.

So the houses spread into and around the wall. Rahab had such a house. She had probably been quite wealthy.

She was somebody who earned a living by immoral means, but that appears to have been in the past. And now she was into flax, linen, and drying it and preparing it for working and things of that type. That at least seems to be hinted at in the narrative.

Now Jericho was taken several chapters later in chapter 6, but here in chapter 2 of Joshua we're just at the stage of the sending forth of the spies to inspect the defences, to report on the morale within the city, to check the water reserves, because they knew not whether or not they'd be called to lay siege or something like that at this early stage. But they were unsuccessful spies. They didn't last a day without detection.

Somehow or other they were rumbled from the very beginning. And they were observed and watched. It appears their movements were tracked.

They were observed making their way through the town into the house of this particular woman. And so a royal warrant went out from the king of that city state. Their mission was doomed.

They were to be hunted down, taken, and no doubt killed. And we read here in the third verse, the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab saying, bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house, for they be come to search out all the country. And the woman took the two men and hid them, and said thus, there came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were.

And it came to pass about the time of the shutting of the gates, when it was dark, that the men went out. Whither the men went, I want not. Pursue after them quickly, for you shall overtake them.

But she had brought them up to the roof of the house and hid them with the stalks of flax linen which she had laid in order upon the roof to dry them out in the heat of the sun. Well, here is Rahab. We discover as

the narrative goes on, and this is what we shall look at, that she had as it were switched sides.

A woman of Jericho, something had happened in her life, in her heart, and she had switched her allegiance from her city state of Jericho and the immediate region around, and she was a supporter of the children of Israel. And she took it upon herself to hide these unfortunate spies. In other words, she had switched to the kingdom of God.

Now she was very much a beginner at early stages, and here you find she hides the spies and she lies quite elaborately to cover them, and she lies about where they've gone and what they've done, and all the time of course she does know who they are, and she's welcomed them, and she's protecting them. Well, some people are very upset because Rahab lied to cover them up. Be that as it may, that's not for me to investigate tonight.

Here she was, a beginner as it were, in God's school. I'm not going to propose to discuss whether there were alternative possibilities for her to protect the spies at that moment other than lying for them, or anything of that sort. That doesn't matter to us tonight.

Here she was, a Canaanite woman who'd lied all her life, was a lying, utterly dishonest society. Now she had been deeply impressed by the God of Israel. She'd switched her allegiance.

This is what I want to look at. Her personal development of character and so on, we will not look too closely into, but you know what the Bible says about her is this, that she'd become a woman of faith. However much an infant along the holy road, she was a woman of faith, and she'd come to trust the Lord, and that's what I'd like us to look at.

How did it come about? Here she is now, willing to take great personal risk and hide the spies. She's on their side. She'll risk her life for them.

How did it ever come to this? And it's very interesting. First of all, her background was pretty awful. And this is an encouragement to us all, because background is no obstacle to coming to seek Jesus Christ.

Whatever our background, we may be saved from it, and we may come to find Christ and to know him and walk with him and prove him. She was, as I've said, a Canaanite, a polytheist. She was in this Sodom-like city of tremendous deprivation, degradation rather, and vice.

She had a city of no morals, a city where there were no standards at all, a city of violence and vice. That's her background. That's how she'd struggle to make her living.

And yet it was no obstruction to her seeking God. In fact, the opposite. It helped her to see through life without the one true and living God, the creator of all things.

Now today's atheism, and I won't spend long with this, is not much different from ancient polytheism. As I have mentioned, the polytheism of ancient times and in some parts of the world today is really a form of atheism. It is a rejection of the one, grand, transcendent creator God.

It is life dissolving into myriad invented deities, all of which have this one purpose, to give you good fortune, to make you rich, to get you on, to avert misfortune and hardship for you. Number one, I am the person who matters when I'm a polytheist. It's just the most superstitious department of atheism, if you want.

But it's materialism. It's for me, all the way through, and my advancement and my enrichment. Today's atheism, just like ancient polytheism, no God, how very convenient.

Without God, there are no divinely imposed standards. There are no ten commandments. There are no absolute rules of right and wrong.

There is no God to fear, no day of judgment, no one watching over my path, no one to be angered by my life and what I do. There is none of that. There is no ultimate purpose, no eternal destiny, no risk to take, nothing to lose, so I think.

So we get a proud, self-indulgent society. And the first thing I want to do is say that the more the Britain leaves behind its Christian roots, the more we see it emerging in life, in commerce, everywhere. You cannot be moral and atheistic, ultimately, whatever atheists try to say.

We see the decline played out before us. Well, friends, in a matter of fact, this is a little digression. I saw an interview that Professor Richard Dawkins gave, and his atheism has become such an obsession, well you know that I'm sure.

It is such a matter of obsession, no God at any price. But there are difficulties in this view. How did life start? Well, he must admit, as he does in writing and in interview, we don't know.

Nobody knows how life started. Well, then, is there any possibility that it is God who started things? No. Rule that out.

It's not so scientific after all. Rule that out at any price. But what about design? What about the intricacy? What about the details of design that come out now in modern biological investigation? It is things unknown to Darwin years ago.

The intricacy and the detail and the powerful evidence of design. Ah well, it could be, said Professor Richard Dawkins, it could be that this is accounted for in the following way. That life was seeded here on planet Earth by some intelligent being elsewhere in the universe.

So we are down now to little green men. There's another society, so sophisticated and advanced that it has been possible from a creature on another planet in another galaxy to seed life on Earth. To seed in the capsule, the particle with all the design required in it for life to be seeded here.

But as Professor Dawkins said, that does mean of course that that source in its turn must have been seeded from somewhere else and perhaps that from somewhere else and back you go across the supposed billions of years and you're still none the wiser. Where was the original society? How did it come about? Now as you listen to this, I am astonished and I think this isn't science, this is an obsession. It must be an obsession.

So antagonistic are we against the possibility of a transcendent God, an infinite spiritual being, a vast intelligence who created all things that we would rather believe in little green men, little blue men, little turquoise men, little intelligences going way back across the billions of years without a beginning, without any evidence, without any sign of them, without any sight of them. That's an obsession friends. Isn't it sad that one intelligent people can become so obsessed about the notion of God that they will begin to believe or allow the possibility of the existence of ludicrous things in order to explain what they acknowledge cannot be known and explained, the origin of life.

You know what makes me sad today is there are many young people and they pick up bits and fragments of modern atheism and they think it must be scientific, it must be correct, there must be something in it, God has been disproved. And when you get back and down to basic principles they have no idea of the foolishness of the level of the reasoning that's going on, the alternative explanation for the origin of life and where it may be and what it may be. Oh dear friends, atheism is little better than ancient polytheism.

The one thing it has in common, it's an obsession against God and it's a determination just to please myself and have no standards, no God to give an account to, no eternity to be concerned about. Now Rahab, I must come back to Rahab, she'd seen through all this. She'd seen through the society of Jericho.

She saw its powerlessness, that society was out of control. She'd seen its shallowness. She knew the city gossip as well as anybody.

She knew what people talked about, what they got excited about, what they worried about. She'd been into the world of lies and self and greed. She knew the worthlessness of the gods who were invented and trusted in and she'd become utterly disillusioned.

Oh I do hope there's somebody here tonight, several people here tonight and you've seen through present society without God and you've become disillusioned. Why you've seen so much? You've seen great figures even in your lifetime. You've seen them fall and you've seen them discredited.

You've seen people who maybe a few years ago you thought they were great people and you've now seen all their mistakes laid bare. Modern life is quite good at exposing human frailty and mistakes. What do you trust in? Haven't you seen through the smallness and the inadequacy of life without God, without a hold on him, without his help? You've seen this world cannot change people.

Atheism can't reform people, improve people, help people, make people happy. The one thing Professor Dawkins says about atheism is he thinks it's liberating. Liberating from what? Liberating from the help of God and belief in him.

Liberating to what? A life without standards, a life without eternity, a life without divine help. What sort of liberation is that? Well Rahab had seen through her society and here was her response. She reasoned dear friends.

She thought where does this leave me if this society is so cruel and base and barren and vain and shallow? Where does it leave me? And it left her here that she began to be attracted to the society of the God of Israel, the Hebrew God, the one God, the concept of one benevolent, loving, wonderful creator who could be known and to whom you could come and who would forgive you all your sin and who would come to your life and bless you and illuminate your days and boil you up and take you one day home into eternal glory and she began to think about such a God and such a person. I refer you to verses eight and nine in this second chapter. Listen to this.

Before they were laid down she came up unto them upon the roof and said to the two spies who she was protecting, she said unto the men, I know that the Lord, she's abandoned her multiplicity of gods, she's speaking about the Lord, the one true God. I know that the Lord hath given you the land and that your terror is fallen upon us and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you.

We've heard the things that have happened. We've heard all about the Hebrews, the children of Israel and how God has helped them and blessed them and he's given them a beautiful law to regulate them and he hears and answers prayer and he's a God of wonders and a God of love who seeks to refine their society and improve their lives and bring them to worship him and love him and know him. She's reasoning.

I've heard these things. Now many people are frightened. They're simply terrified by these things but I want this Lord, she says.

I believe in him. I believe he is the true God. She reasoned.

You need to see the Lord to see through society without God and you need to reason and think about the blessings that God has declared and promised to people who turn to him. She did some comparisons in what she says. We note, she says, we as a people are weak and doomed and you as a people, she says to the spies, you are strong and helped by the one true God.

That's what she said to them. We as a people we're all bribes and stabbing in the back and cheating and lies and you as a people, you have those ten commandments, you have a holy law, you have regulation of society and how envious I am of these things. We as a people are days and nights, days and numbered.

We cannot survive as a society tearing ourselves apart and you as a people, we've heard how you've grown and been established and developed and we as a people, we don't know what to do. We've got a rotten king and rotten princes and rulers and we don't know where you're going and you as a people, you are guided and blessed and helped. Do you want to do that sort of reasoning friends? I am not a Christian, you may say to yourself, I belong to this world, this is my family and my society, but we have no eternal life and you people in the church of Christ who love him and trust him, you have eternal life.

We have no guidance from God, we don't believe in him and you have his word and his teaching and his help and you can pray to him. We don't have anything like this. Think like Rahab, she compared their lot with the lot of the children of Israel and their blessing and their help and the intervention of God in their lives.

That's how you come to Christ. Something stirs within you, you see you've been cheated and defrauded and deprived and denied and you begin to think, oh, what a difference if I became a Christian, if my sins were forgiven, sins against God, if I was brought into communion with him, if I could know him and know about him and feel his touch upon my life and know that I was a child of heaven and learn of him deep things, wonderful things and be changed and have my character deepened and my sins taken away. What a wonderful thing, she reasoned and she thought and these are verses full of thought and reasoning and so she made her advance to the one true God.

Today we are polytheists, only we worship earthly idols. Life is a journey they say today. They like to use that language.

What sort of a journey is it? A journey for getting more, having more, enjoying more, more for me. It's a journey, yes. Earthly idols, you've no explanation of why you're here, you've no explanation of where you're going, you've no deep happiness and security and character and inner strength.

It's just a journey for stuff and things and experiences and so on. That's all. But Rahab weighed matters and she realised she needed the true and living God and she wanted to be with those who had him.

Rahab therefore believed, she came to believe in the one true God. Let me read a couple of verses here. She says to these spies because she's convinced they'll be safe and that the Israelites will occupy the land and in verse 12 she says, now therefore I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord since I have showed you kindness that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house and give me a true token and that ye will save alive my father and my mother and my brethren and my sisters and all that they have and deliver our lives from death.

She believes that God is with these other people and she wants to be with them and that's what happened in due course and they made her a promise and she believed it would be kept. Now listen friends, once you realise you need God and you need all your sins against him and you very, very many forgiven and you need a new life and a new start and you need to be related to him and have him as your God and Christ as your Saviour, once you realise these things you start to believe the way you may be saved, the way to find him. Do you know what it is? He came from the courts of heaven into this world of time, you know that? He lived on this earth demonstrating his divine power and majesty and his wonderful compassion and kindness in so very many miraculous healings.

He revealed his character, his perfect, perfect holy life and his love for lost humanity and then he allowed himself to be arrested, it was his will, and to be crucified and to suffer and die on Calvary's cross where in accordance with ancient prophecy and his own clear statements God the Father put upon him, the second person of the Trinity, the Son, our representative, God the Father put upon him all the guilt of those who would be saved, those who would be forgiven, those who would depend upon him and turn to him and the Father invisibly something infinitely worse than crucifixion. The Father punished him on our behalf, he called upon the Father to do so, punish me instead of them who I will save and he took the eternal punishments and penalty of sin on our behalf. Such amazing love, we cannot even begin to hear about the way of salvation, God is so holy, God is so just, he cannot let us off our sins, he must judge and punish sin, he must do it, it must be punished from his moral universe.

What will God do to save us? He will punish himself in the person of Jesus Christ, second person of the Trinity so that we may be forgiven, so that we may be saved and have heaven, have eternity and here is the promise of God that if we come to him he will forgive us and he will change us and he will bless us. Christ's promise, him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out, you come to him sincere in your heart and you know you are a desperately guilty sinner and you need his pardon and you ask him to forgive you and to receive you and to bless you, if you mean that sincerely that prayer he will forgive you, he will keep his promise, he will never turn you away. Rahab believed the promise of the spies, the messengers of God's people and they said to her, you must remember the record from your reading of the Bible, perhaps from your Sunday school days, the very rope which she used to lower the spies down outside the city wall, it was a scarlet coloured rope, that very rope said to the spies, you put that out when the city is destroyed and we will see it and we will honour our pledge and we will save you and your household and she put out that scarlet rope when the time came because she believed the promise.

What a picture for us, Christ says him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out, you believe that he has promised to save all who come to him and trust him and repent of their sin and unreservedly repent before him and give your life to him and leave the world side, why he will keep his promise, it is like a scarlet rope, you come to him according to his call and he will bless you and he will receive you. Rahab, well our time has gone, she had a new occupation, she had changed, she had found the Lord, she had new worship, we read about that in verse 11 here, as soon as we had heard these things, she says, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man because of you and listen to these words,

for the Lord your God, he is in heaven above and in earth beneath, she was a worshipper of the one true God, she had a new allegiance and would risk her life for the spies, she had new behaviour we see here in this record, this is a history of conversion, a polytheist, a materialist and she saw the point and she had stirred within her an instinct for the one true creator God, almighty God and she reasoned life with this true God is vastly superior and she believed that she could be forgiven and blessed and received and changed and she repented and she proved him and that is what we must do dear friends in coming and in finding the true God, depend on Christ's amazing kindness to lost souls, depend on his sacrifice on Calvary and what he has done to pay the punishment of your sin if you come to him, depend on his absolute reliability, don't trust all the politicians but trust Christ, he is God, he is perfect, he is true to his promise, trust his power to transform anyone and to change us completely, repent and believe and you will know him, why here we have been talking about Rahab, 1400 years before Christ came and 2000 years plus since, centuries passing, people finding Christ, seeing their need, reasoning in their minds, I need the true and living God and I will seek him and repent and yield to him and find him and he is receiving people still this night and will do so and till he comes again and brings this present phase of the world to an end, trust him, look to him, believe in him and be saved. Let's pray together, O God our gracious heavenly father, teach us and show us the way to seek thee and find thee, come down and move our hearts, deliver us from the clutches of materialism and earthly idols, deliver us from the clutches of pride and vain glory and self-seeking, deliver us from the lies of atheism, O Lord work in every heart we pray and turn us to thyself that we may prove thee and know real change and real power and blessing from on high, we ask these things in the name of our saviour for his sake, Amen.

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