

The Scarlet Cord
Joshua 2:8-21
Key Verse: 2:21

by Sarah Barry

"Agreed, she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away and tied the scarlet cord in the window."

This past week-end we held the North America Staff Conference in Chicago, near O'Hare airport. Dr. John Jun gave the keynote address on "The Gospel, the Power of God," based on Romans 1:8-32 and focused on verse 16: "I am not afraid of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...I gave the opening message, and that is the message, "the Scarlet Cord," which I want to share with you today. We continued to explore the subject of house churches. We studied Peter's sermon and the beginning of the New Testament house church in Acts 2. Dr. Joseph Schafer gave a testimonial lecture, "The seed and fruit of the house church." So we continued to think about and pray for our house church ministry. In the previous staff conference, we thought about the house church of Priscilla and Aquila. It is the power of the gospel that establishes house churches. And it is Almighty God who is working in and through his church. Indeed, he works in small house churches as well as in and through mega churches. It is Almighty God at work in his Church who changes lives and plants his kingdom in people's hearts. The gospel is the power of God to save those who believe..

The thing that makes a house church different from an ordinary Christian family, in addition to the seed of the gospel and faith in the transforming power of God, is God's mission. Yesterday many of us attended the wedding of Joe Kim and Rebecca Oh. I believe that each of them as a sense of God's mission, and they want their family to be a house church.

Today I want to think about how God used one different kind of house church, how he used a woman of great faith in the Almighty power of God. The woman's name is Rahab, and she became an ancestress of King David and of Jesus Christ. However, at the time our story begins, she was not married. She was a most unlikely person to be used in God's history. She was a Gentile. She was a business woman and her business has been called the world's oldest profession. She supported her parents and her extended family. Her house, very conveniently, was a part of the city wall. Her home was always open to travelers. Her inn did good business. Travelers from all over the world came and stayed at her bed and breakfast place. So she heard stories and news about people and nations, about events from everywhere. It was the nearest thing to an international internet connection. Rahab also heard amazing stories about the God of Israel, whom they called "the Lord God." She heard about his amazing power and his mercy and love. He rescued the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt. He had dried up the waters of the Red Sea and allowed the people of Israel to cross over on dry land. She also heard that the Lord God had given the Israelites victory over the powerful rulers on the East Bank of the Jordan River. She realized that this God is the true God, the Creator of the heaven and the earth. In her heart, she wanted to know him and be one of his people. Now, the people of Israel camped on the east side of the Jordan, just across the river from her city. Jericho was a strategic city. It was the first powerful walled city that the Israelites would encounter. It was the doorway to the land of Canaan, the Promised land.

The power of the gospel is the power of the Almighty God. It is the power that parted the Red Sea and made the walls of Jericho come crashing down. It is the power that raised Jesus from the dead. It is the power that changes human hearts. There are two shepherds who should cowork with each other. But they can't. There a husband and wife who should love and respect each other. But they don't. We can't do anything to change another's heart. I can't even change my own heart. There is a couple that wants a baby. But only the almighty Creator God gives life. Some of us have marriage problems. Only the gracious love of the Almighty God can give us peace and direction. We need the power of Almighty God working in our lives and in our homes and in our ministry.

First, by faith, Rahab hides the spies

There was a high, strong wall around the Jericho. But the two young Israelite spies slipped into the city. These young men were sent to assess prospects for conquering the land. They entered the house of Rahab the prostitute and found refuge there. The king of Jericho heard that the spies had come to Rahab's inn. He demanded that she turn them over to him. This was the time of decision for Rahab. It was reasonable and even morally right for her to be

loyal to her own city and people. She should have turned in the spies. But something stopped her. She had come to believe that the God of Israel was the one true God. She made a decision to trust God, the Creator of heaven and earth and protect the spies. She decided to cast her lot with the people of Israel. She saved the spies. So she lied. She reported to the king: "Some suspicious men did indeed come to my house, but at dusk, the time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. They haven't been gone long, so if you go after them quickly you can probably catch them." The Jericho soldiers set out in pursuit of the spies. They guessed that they would go toward the Jordan and try to cross the river at one of the shallow fords. The city gates were closed behind them. In the meantime, Rahab had hidden the spies on her roof top by covering them with stalks of flax.

Hebrews 11:29 says, "by faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." Rahab could have not trusted the men who came to her inn. She could have reported them to the king and identified with own people. But she chose, by faith, to stand with God's people, so she hid the spies. She chose to obey God because she believed that God is the true God, the Creator and owner of heaven and earth. She did a dangerous thing. She put her life in jeopardy. God honored Rahab's faith and adopted her into his own family.

Back in 1944 in Holland, Hitler was exterminating the Jews. A Christian watchmaker named Casper Ten Boom put himself and his family at great risk by rescuing, hiding and saving all the Jews he could. Their house church became the hiding place. It cost him his life. It cost the lives of his family members. But the heavenly kingdom was planted in their hearts. Only one daughter survived to tell the story. She told her story of faith and courage, pain, death and forgiveness. Only the almighty power of God could heal her bitter and wounded heart. Only God could enable her to forgive. Thousands of people have come to Jesus because of her story and that house church. God, who forgives us through the blood of Jesus, enables us to forgive and trust and love not only our enemies, but our friends as well.

In 2002, I visited the underground house church of Moses and Sarah in Beijing. We did not go to their 4th floor apartment, where their house church met. We did not want to endanger them. We met in a restaurant and quietly sang hymns and studied the Bible with them and their sheep. Last year they were caught and expelled from China. But the seed of the gospel had been planted and that house church continues to meet, led by Maria, one in whose heart the gospel seed took root. There are many such underground churches in China--the house church movement is growing as men and women of faith risk their lives to follow Jesus. Seeds of the gospel are planted and the almighty power of God is at work in and through house churches in China. We can't know about them in detail, but we can pray. And we can also pray for the seed of the gospel that is being planted in China and in the Muslim world by Point, Moses, Joseph, Maria Joy, James, Studd, Peter and others. We believe that in the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of those who believe.

Second, Rahab strengthened their faith

That night, she went up on the roof where the spies were hiding and made a remarkable confession of faith to them. She said, "We heard how the Lord your God dried up the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt." We heard how he gave you victory over the Amorites. I believe that the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." She went on to tell them, "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and a great fear of you has fallen on us , so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you." Now the people of Israel were the ones who had experienced the amazing power and love of God. But as they faced their first enemy and looked at the strong, impregnable walls of the city of Jericho, fear came into their hearts. They were very quick to forget the almighty power of their God. Rahab had greater faith than they had. They borrowed her faith and went back and told Joshua, "The Lord has given us this land." This was the message the Israelites needed to hear. They could win the battle before it started.

God used this Gentile woman to plant faith in the hearts of his people. How important it is to strengthen one another's faith. How important it is to confess our faith. How important it is to live by the faith we confess. Monica Barry is a woman of faith. By faith, she drove by herself (with Jesus) 2009 miles across the Rocky mountains in the dead of winter to come back to Chicago. By faith she went to Uganda. She is 66 and has diabetes. She could go back to the Philippines and take it easy with her rich family. But she chose to live by faith to the end. Her faith in action strengthens my faith.

John and Maria Peace answered God's call to go out as missionaries. They moved their house church, including their 4 children to the Ukraine. Sometimes people think, "well, I can make the sacrifice necessary to be a missionary, but what about my children? I can't ask them to make such a sacrifice. But God put on the hearts of John and Maria his call to world mission. He gave them faith in the Almighty God . God calls and God protects and God blesses. After being in Kiev 5 years, he led them one step further. They sent their oldest daughter, then their 2nd daughter to Turkey, to be student missionaries, to take the seed of the gospel to the Muslim world. They believe in the power and love of Almighty God. Their decisions to trust and obey the call of almighty God strengthens my faith.

Third, the scarlet cord

Rahab was very sure of God's victory. She had one request: "When you enter and conquer the land, Please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them and that you will save us from death." The young men agreed. "Our lives for your lives. If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land." She told them when and where to go, how to get back to the Jordan river crossing without getting caught. After waiting until the pursuers were gone, she let them down through a window that overlooked the city wall. The spies gave her a scarlet cord. She was to hang it in the window through which the spies escaped. Everyone in that house marked by the scarlet cord would be saved. By faith, Rahab hung the scarlet cord from the window of her house.

The fall of Jericho was one of the amazing acts of Almighty God. Joshua and the army of Israel won the victory by obeying God's word in careful detail. The city wall that protected the city became a prison wall that kept anyone from going in or out. Joshua and the people of Israel marched around the wall, obeying God's instructions. For seven days they marched, then, at Joshua's command, they shouted, and the walls of Jericho fell down. The city and all in it were devoted to the Lord--completely destroyed. The one exception was Rahab the prostitute and those in her house which was marked by a scarlet cord. When Jericho was overthrown, the young spies rescued her. She married Salmon (maybe one of the spies?) And her house church became a source of blessing, for their son was Boaz who married Ruth. They were part of the genealogy of King David and of Jesus (Mt1; Ruth 4).

We are sinners living in a world that faces the judgment of almighty God. Perhaps the earthquake in Haiti was a sample of God's judgment. But God's judgement is redemptive. Many people of Haiti have turned to God in repentance and faith. God has given us the scarlet cord. It is the blood of Jesus that saves us. It is the blood of Jesus that forgives the sins of repentant sinners. It is the power of his resurrection that gives life. It is the power of the gospel that changes lives. It is the power of this gospel that establishes and uses all kinds of people and all kinds of house churches in God's redemptive history.

Let us give thanks to the Almighty God for his saving grace. Let us worship him and him alone. May he send his Holy Spirit and work mightily among us. May he use us to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to the campuses of America and the world. Let us pray for the house churches of Philip and Sarah Brown in China, Alison and Steve Hagar in Taiwan, Don and Hannah Kuper in Argentina, Mike Thompson and Ruthie and Charles in Russia, and others whom God has sent out from among us to plant the seed of the gospel. Let us pray, believing the almighty power of the gospel.

May the scarlet cord of Jesus' blood forgive and cleanse us from sin, and save us from slavery to our sinful nature and from death. May God's almighty power working in us enable us to forgive and love one another. May this seed of the gospel bear fruit in the house churches of Chicago UBF.

One word: The scarlet cord.