

In every disaster the search for survivors can go on for hours and even days. Just ask the fifteen year old girl, the last survivor pulled from the Murrah Building April 19th almost ten hours after the bomb went off. Just ask Genelle Guzman-McMillan, the last survivor pulled from the World Trade Center an amazing twenty seven hours after the planes hit. Where would these people be if not for the rescuers commitment to going after each and every survivor? No matter that they were the last; the rescuers were going just as strong after them as they did the first.

Every person you see, including yourself, is a victim with a fatal condition. We're a world filled with disaster victims. Sin claims each of us and would drag each of us to hell. There's no possibility of rescuing ourselves or hope to change our fate. We're not survivors but victims suffering the worst consequence. We're trapped with no way out.

There's a search for survivors as the focus of the first lesson this morning. Not the traditional look of a bombed out building or disaster but rather in a nation facing destruction. There in the city of Jericho God was demonstrating that even people outside his chosen people were eligible for God's grace. There in a city marked for destruction...

God goes after even one
A result of an active Word
Displaying his mercy

Joshua sent the spies to Jericho with a very practical mission; reconnaissance of the city. They were to report numbers of people and soldiers, protections and locations of weak spots. But they either weren't good spies or someone tipped off the people of Jericho because they were discovered. Their only hope was the place where they were hiding, the home of a less than respectable woman named Rahab. If she told the authorities the spies were done. She didn't, and before they knew it the spies discovered there was more to their mission than just recon work.

The people of Israel were still wandering in the desert as these events played out. Jericho was to be their first conquest in the Promised Land, the land that God had given to them hundreds of years before. God promised them the land and that he would fight for them. But the Israelites had shaky faith, and wanted more. Rahab told the spies exactly what they wanted to know. **"All who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt."** The Israelites hadn't fought a battle in the Promised Land and already people were afraid of them. The general sense of Jericho was that no one was going to be able to stand up against the Israelites with God on their side.

Rahab seemed to have a different attitude. She wasn't so much afraid of God as she believed in him. **"I know that the Lord has given this land to you...for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below."** Her words were more confession than fear. But how did she hear? She told the spies the people of Jericho had heard how the Lord did all these things for his people. She had heard words about God. The Word of God was actively spreading. Word of his power and promises, word about the great things he had done for his people. Even among people outside the promise God's Word had spread. Law to make them fearful but also gospel to save them. And here, in a city with unbelievers all around was Rahab, one woman who believed in this God because of the Word she had heard.

There are certainly times we're afraid of God's judgment, and rightly so. Think of Rahab's position. She apparently was a prostitute doing things that flew in the face of what God wanted for marriage. Where in our lives do we do things that maybe fly in the face of what God wants for marriage? Living together or sexual intimacy before marriage? What about being on the internet and staring lustfully at someone not our spouse? Even telling jokes about marriage might be sinful. We're no different than Rahab or the people of Jericho, having in the past gone against God and deserving to be punished for our sins.

God directed the events of this spy mission to go after even one person who would be saved. God directed the events of your life so that you also came into contact with his Word. You too heard about the power of God and his promises. You too heard about the great things he did for his people. This gospel message regarding what Jesus has done for you has convinced you of God's love. Jesus convinced you of the forgiveness for your sins against God's plan for marriage. It's the Word of God actively working behind enemy lines of the devil that snatched us from death to life in Christ.

The spies didn't set out to convert even one of the people of Jericho to faith. In fact they were thinking God wanted all the people of Jericho put to death. But the Word of God had gone ahead of them into Jericho and worked on one particular woman and her family. Rahab was a child of God, even though she was originally an outsider. But the spies could see that the Word had worked on her and God opened their eyes to see that he was displaying his glorious mercy in her.

Rahab knew what was coming. It was only a matter of time before Israel's God gave them the land and took it away from her people. She still lived in the prostitute's house and had that reputation around town. We might think she was trying to save her own life, but Rahab's life was different. Her faith was new and possibly weak but it was real, and it was responding to God's mercy. She could see God's mercy in the past acting for the Israelites. Now she wanted that same mercy for herself. **"Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you."** Her request is based on the Lord. She used the Lord's own saving name to ask for mercy. The Lord's mercy and his promises had won another soul for heaven.

We can't understand God's mercy displayed in our lives if we can't see from God's Word how far we've fallen. Could we see ourselves on the same level in society as Rahab, as low as a prostitute? What about the petty thief or the lazy worker? Are we equal with them? What about the person who has a great marriage, a good job, and volunteers regularly, There's someone we'd probably want to be like. But all of them are equal. We're all equal in God's eyes. Paul said to the Romans, **"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."** Everyone is at the same level. All are considered sinners in God's eyes. God did that so that all could be shown mercy.

God displayed his amazing mercy by coming after each one of us in just the way we needed. For some it was at birth through baptism. For others it was the love of a spouse consistently talking about Jesus and demonstrating faith in action that broke through the hard heart. For still others it was a powerful change of circumstance that had us looking around wondering where to go for help and finding help in the loving open arms of Christ Jesus.

No one would say efforts to save people lost in a pile of rubble were wasted effort. Rescuers go after even just one if they think they can save them. Rahab was buried deep in disaster, but God's Word had worked on her heart. That scarlet cord Rahab hung outside her window doesn't seem to have any special significance. Yet Christian writers can't help but make a connection. That scarlet color reminds us of Christ's blood shed on the cross for sinners. When Rahab put it out the window she announced she was saved by God and was to be spared destruction. It signaled God's Word to her wasn't wasted. You too have a scarlet cord hanging from your heart. It's the signal that Christ died for you and you're saved. God's Word was active in your life and God's mercy continues to be on display. We know we have a God who goes after even one.