

Editor's Note: This sermon and the defense by Wells (“The Faith of Rahab Defended”) are historically important. They had a profound and lasting effect on Wells personally and professionally. There is also a theological importance. God in His grace blessed James Wells with great insight, allowing him to enter into the real meat of the Gospel. Others, like John Foreman (and all the rest of those who should have supported him) had a mixed diet. In physical practice Wells ate little or no meat but in doctrinal truth his was as a lion feasting on the meat of the word of God. As a servant devoted to his Lords people, he used every opportunity to feed the seep. Thirdly they are profoundly practical. God is Sovereign! This is the message of the Bible from beginning to end. Wells strength came from practical day to day worship to, trust in and obedience to God as a Sovereign God.

It is a sad fact the virtually all of Wells ministerial brothers, (apart from his own congregation), those closest to him in belief and practice, attacked him as a bitter enemy over these sermons. It's no surprise that those who openly or in secret deny the sovereignty of God should do so. It is however shameful in the extreme that the others did. It is my firm belief that they did this for at least three reasons: one, the time they lived in (Victorian England), two, selfish jealousy and thirdly partial unbelief in the Sovereignty of God. In case the reader gets the wrong impression, the purpose here is not to find fault with those who turned against James Wells in this matter. We all have feet of clay, we all (James Wells and myself included) stumble and partially fall. (The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble he will not fall for the Lord upholds him with his hand Psalm 37:23, 24 NIV). The purpose is to benefit from these sermons historically, practically and doctrinally. In order to accomplish this some of the facts need to be stated so that modern reader has some context.

As is my common practice I have changed the text to edit as much of the old English words as possible. In addition, for these sermons, I have added emphasis and notes to help the reader gain as much as possible from this sermon. Ideally, they should be read together or as near to as is possible - Richard Schadle

Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit

THE FAITH OF RAHAB THE HARLOT

SERMON Preached on Lord's Day Morning June 18th 1865,

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 7 Number 341

**“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not.”
Hebrews 11:31**

THAT certainly is not a right spirit that grudges a fellow-creature the salvation of his soul; and yet we see such a spirit in existence. We see the Pharisee despising the publican, and thereby, as it were, grudging him; because the publican was by his sin, and by divine sufferance, God suffering him, such a degraded character, therefore, the Pharisee grudged him his salvation. And so, with the prodigal; because he had been such a degraded character, such a depraved character, the elder brother grudged him his salvation. And so, with the Pharisees of old when the Savior did eat with publicans and sinners, and declared that publicans and harlots entered the kingdom of heaven, while these straight-haired, clean-footed, cast-iron, devil-taught Pharisees were shut out, and should die in their sins, they grudged poor sinners their salvation. But perhaps this does not come exactly to the point; **it is God's way of saving the soul that man objects to**¹, God loving a man simply because he would love him, and choosing him simply because he would; and imputing the man's sins to Christ simply because he would, and imputing the work of Christ to him in salvation because he would, and preserving that man while in a state of nature simply because he would, and calling him at the appointed moment simply because he would; and dealing with him after he has called him just as seemed good in his sight, not as seemed good in the man's sight, nor as seemed good in the sight of others, but as seemed good in his own sight, and keeping him to the end with infallible certainty; and presenting him ultimately on the vantage-ground of victory before the throne; this is that which the spirit of the world had always hated and still hates. This is the salvation that the world and Pharisees grudge a poor sinner. And hence our text; how hard do the learned try to fritter away the testimony of God concerning the dreadful degradation of this woman in her former state, and so to deny the grace of God that honor and that glory by which she was saved, and by which her spirit is now before the throne of God in all the perfection of mediation, and singing as loud as any of them there. And there is not anything you could think of, think of what you may, to which the spirit of the world is so averse as it is to God's free grace salvation, to the real liberty of the gospel. But let God take a Saul of Tarsus or any other man in hand, and let the Lord break up the foundations of the great deep within that man's heart; let that man's soul be tried with the ten thousand infidelities and unnamable abominations of his heart; let him see and feel himself spiritually as the word of God declares, full of wounds, and bruises and putrefying sores, no part sound; let a sinner be convinced in this way, he will feel that he has not a stone to throw at any one. He will look at what he is, and say, "What have I to do with other people's sins? I have nothing but sin to call my own." "This is a faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."² I am the greatest wonder here. I am aware it has been declared that Saul of Tarsus alone can adopt that language, "I am the chief of sinners;" **but** it is the language that **every real Christian adopts, because every real Christian sees more sin in himself than he can see in all others put together.** And where there is this spirit, then it is that spirit the apostle exhorts to when he says, "Esteeming each other better than himself."³⁴ **And the Christian, when he comes to his right mind, is glad to see the grace of God anywhere, let it be wherever it may.** He is glad to see the grace of God in Manasseh, in Magdalene, the thief, or

¹ Upper most on James Wells mind as he began his sermon is the fact the God is Sovereign. In this preface to the sermon he outlines this fact in a marked manner.

² 1 Timothy 1:15

³ Philippians 2:3

⁴ When Wells delivered this sermon, he no concept of the absolute rage it would cause. Yet here in this passage is God's answer to that rage: HUMILITY. As will be shown, those who could have acted in humility chose instead to act in outright arrogant pride. I am referencing here those who, with regard to outward appearance, were like minded in ministry, doctrine, fellowship, practice and creed. Those who were truly saved and raised up by God to be his chosen ministers.

anywhere; Yes, so far from the Christian, that knows his own heart and his own state, grudging another his salvation, he rather blesses God for those wondrous instances given in the word of his grace reaching down to the lowest, taking up the most depraved, the most monstrous, and turning them into kings and priests to God, consecrating them to himself forever. And after all, it matters comparatively little which you and I were reckoned when we were in a state of nature, among the creatures in Peter's vision. There were wild beasts, and four-footed beasts, and birds of prey, and creeping things; they were all beasts from first to last, and be what you may by nature, they were all equally destitute, all in a state of deformity, and so there is none righteous, none that doeth good, no, not one.

I shall not this morning occupy your time in dwelling (for I shall leave you entirely to your own reflections, lest I should be misunderstood) upon some points that I could have entered into. I will leave you to your own reflections upon the wonderful counsel of God pertaining to this woman, his deep counsel in suffering her so to degrade herself, his deep counsel in placing her in a house that should be just convenient for the spies to come to, his deep counsel in overruling the worst of things to the best of purposes. I will leave you to your own reflections upon this, lest any should go away with an impression that I hold the horrid and loathsome doctrine of doing evil that good may come. **I hold no such doctrine**⁵, and no child of God ever did, or ever will, or ever can sin from such a motive. I shall therefore pass by all the circumstances of original character, and shall simply notice what our text presents, namely, her faith. "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not."

I shall notice first, *what she believed*; secondly, *her integrity*; third, *her prayer*; fourth, *her manifold success*.

First, then, I notice *what she believed*. And we must take a twofold view of what she believed. First, she believed in the unalterable decision of the counsels of God; for she said, "I know that the Lord has given you the land." This is one thing she believed. Now, then, let us, without inquiring far into what her precise views were connected with eternal things, let us Christianize this part of her creed. "I know that the Lord has given you the land." Are we not brought to know that there is a people upon whom was bestowed the kingdom from the foundation of the world? "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Has the Lord altered from that day to this? Has he not rested in his love ever since, rested in his promise ever since, and rested in his dear Son ever since? And rest he will. So that eternal glory, this kingdom being given, Christ being given, eternal glory, though we are not yet there any more than the Israelites were yet in the Cana, yet eternal glory is given; they all stand inseparably connected. Why, the very first article of her creed contains all the apostle means when he says, "Whom he did foreknow he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son; and whom he did predestinate he called; whom he called, he justified; and whom he justified, he glorified." The matter is done. Now the importance of this lies here. **There are true experiences and there are false experiences**. If your so-called Christian experience be not only a so-called Christian experience but a real Christian experience, it will give you such a knowledge of yourselves that you can live by nothing but these unalterable settlements, you must have an immutable God; you must have a yea and amen promise; you must have a mediatorial perfection; you must have a sworn covenant. Your daily experience, if it be true experience, will teach you that if the Lord were to

⁵ This statement alone should have given pause to his critics. His whole life and ministry are a witness to his godliness.

change you are consumed; that if there be any possibility of any failure there you are lost; and that you cannot rest nor live unless you can with propriety sing with the poet,

“Nor aid he needs, nor duties asks,
Of us poor feeble worms:
What everlasting love decrees,
Almighty power performs.”

Thus, she had something to rest upon. “I know he has given you the land.” There it is. So now, bless the Lord, there is no uncertainty. You that are brought to feel your need of his immutability, he will not leave you, will not forsake you, will not neglect you, never, never. **A fellow-creature may leave you for one fault**; the living God will not leave you for all your faults. A fellow-creature may look black at you for twenty years for one fault; God will never look black at you for all your faults put together. He lives in all the perfection of his dear Son, holds you there free from sin, even as Christ is free. If you are taught of God, then, this will be your resting-place, and you will make it your consolation. You will be glad to have a few saints to converse with, a Christian or two; it is all very well in its way, but at the same time nothing will satisfy you but the fountain-head itself, God himself, the promise itself, Christ himself; there you will find all that you can need, a faithful and unchanging God. “He has given you the land.” There is everything to make you cleave unto him. Now it was by faith Rahab received this. **I scorn, I despise, I hold in infinite and eternal contempt the notion of the possibility of any sinner being brought to believe in 'Immanuel, and that that sinner's condition is so bad that the blood of Immanuel cannot take out the stain, that his atonement cannot swallow up the guilt, that his blood cannot put the devil down, that his atonement cannot lift the sinner up, because of the great mountains of sin lying upon that sinner.** Why, that sinner says, My sins are like so many great mountains lying upon me; what hope is there? Why, know you not, poor sinner, that Immanuel overturns the mountains by the roots? know you not that Immanuel did mystically and spiritually what Jonah did literally, that he went down to the bottom of the mountains, and overturned them by the roots? Why, if I were the greatest sinner practically that ever walked God Almighty's earth, and if I had been carrying on sin with gigantic force for a thousand years, or even ten thousand years, if I am blessed with a grain of faith in Immanuel my sins are swallowed up, the devil defeated, my soul saved, grace prevailing, the truth made good, the Savior triumphant, God glorified, and that forever. **Oh, my hearer, who can search out God to perfection?** Therefore, it is she believed, and perished not with them that believed not. Why, she was the very person to believe, and the very person to magnify the grace of God. And she went to work with all her might directly, as we shall presently show, if I can get on far enough. Now how is it with us? Have we this faith? Do we see ourselves inwardly, do we see ourselves in reality, not a fraction better than the worst? If we do, then we shall not grudge Rahab her salvation, but we shall bless God for this manifestation of his .mercy; we shall believe in the same truth, rest upon the same promise, and the evidence of interest shall be, if we have nothing else, we have nothing else at first, the evidence shall be our belief of it, faith, the divine persuasion of it; then it will lead to that which I shall presently have to describe. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.” Oh, when the Lord gives strength to my faith, I can say this morning there is not a trouble I ever have had. there is not a care I have now of any kind, that I cannot smile at; they all appear as chaff upon the summer threshing-floor, and the wind carries them away; I do not care a rush for any of them. But when gloomy doubts prevail, when the Lord is pleased to suffer clouds to come between my soul

and himself, and I cannot see that he is mine, feeling how inadequate I am to stand against what must be my lot, then I tremble and fear, then I cry out, "Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me; make me not the reproach of the foolish." I can pray, then, many prayers in the book of Psalms. It is the Lord's presence that melts the mountains down; when the Lord is pleased to come near, and endear the Savior's name, then all our troubles are lost in the blest Immanuel's name.

Second, she saw that all that stood in the way of the Israelites was a mere nothing. Now, when you can see that, you are in your right mind. Have you afflictions, have you enemies, have you fears of losses, or have you losses? Let it be what it may; a very little may be too much for you, but then there is nothing that is too much for the Lord, you know. And so, she says, to give you an idea of the state of things, "Your terror is fallen upon us, and all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you." This is just what the spies wanted; this is one thing they wanted; they wanted to know what the state of things was. Now Rahab let them into the secret: "For we have heard", and that is a part of her creed I shall have to attend to presently, how the "Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what you did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man." Well, then, said one spy to the other, if that is it, we are safe. Is that our God? What, has he done all this? What have we to fear, then? Nothing. The free-will spies, thirty-eight, years before, said, "They are giants, and we are grasshoppers in their sight;" and so measured the men by themselves, and themselves by the men. They should have measured the men by the Lord; and then, if they had done so, they would have said, "Well, they are giants to us, and we are but grasshoppers; but then they are infinitely more inferior to the Lord than we are to them. We are not to measure them with ourselves, but to measure them with the Lord." And so, our troubles and enemies, we are not to measure them by ourselves, but by the Lord. It is the Lord we are to look to; he can carry us through. "As thy days, so shall be thy strength." You will recollect, in the 15th of Exodus, Moses, forty years before this circumstance, predicted this state of things. "The people shall hear, and be afraid; sorrow shall take hold of the inhabitants of Palestina." Also, Moses noticed the intervening nations. "Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold of them," when the children of Israel went on, in spite of all their doings and greatness. So that not only should they thus occupy all the land, but whatever they met with by the way, that must also give way before the God of Israel. Now this was one part of Rahab's creed. Believe you this? Do you believe your God can do everything? Do you believe that you can carry mountains as easily as you can carry straws, if he be with you? Why, Samson, it is true none of us could do literally as Samson did, but we may spiritually and circumstantially, if the Lord be with us. "Oh," the Gazaites said, "we shall have Samson in the morning." What a mercy the devil is sure to be too late, or else to go to the wrong place, or to the wrong person; sure, to make a mistake when the Lord steps in. They made sure that Samson would sleep till the morning; and I think he was rather sleepy-headed at times; still, he was not then; up he rose in the midnight, and took the gates, bars, posts, and all, and, walked off about twenty miles, a good step, with them; threw them to the top of the hill. And yet the dastardly Judaites did not recognize his worth then! Set of cowards! they preferred slavery to the glorious liberty which Samson aimed to work out. The same as there are now some, I hope, good people, that seem to prefer a half-way gospel. It is because they do not know their need. And that is the second article of Rahab's creed, namely, that the Lord reigned, that the Israelites had nothing to fear; that Jordan he would divide, the walls he would throw down, the enemy he would overthrow; and that his people should get the land in possession not by their

own sword, nor should their own arm save them; but by his right hand, by his arm, by the light of his countenance, because he had a favor unto them.

The third part of her creed was the salvation of God. “We have heard how the Lord divided the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt.” Those waters that destroyed Pharaoh and his host were dried for you. That mighty ocean of wrath that carries the unbelieving sinner away to everlasting perdition is made dry for you, dried up for you; you that believe, it will not touch you, will not come near you. We have heard of the great salvation; we have heard of this, but we have so heard of it as to hate it. That is the effect; only Rahab is an exception, because the Lord opened her eyes. So now, there may be one or two here this morning will go away and say, “Well, I went to hear that man at the Surrey Tabernacle.” “And how did you like him?” “Didn’t like him at all.” “Why not?” “Why, because he went so far; didn’t preach good works enough.” You would have liked him to have plastered the creature up; that is what you mean in reality. He did not tell me what a nice free-will, duty-faith, responsible creature I am; did not make me in part my own Savior. And so, you will go away; just hear enough of the truth to hate it. It is one thing, my hearer, so to hear of God’s salvation as to be made to feel our need of it, and to embrace it; it is another thing so to hear it as to hate it. The last part of her creed is the universality of the blessed God. Your God, why, he is the only God; there is no other. “The Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath;” the universality of the blessed God. So, Jesus Christ, by his mediatorial work, has acquired universal power. “You have given him power over all flesh.” **Our God cannot be shut out of any circumstances.** No, do not shut the Lord out of anything. If you are ill, say, “It’s the Lord.” If you are well, say, “It’s the Lord.” If you have troubles in your family, say, “It’s the Lord: and if you have prosperity and peace, say, “It’s the Lord” and if Shimei curse you, say, “It’s the Lord lets him curse;” and if people bless you, say, “It’s the Lord lets them be friends;” and if people are kind to you, say “it’s the Lord turning their hearts to you;” and if people hate you, say “it’s the Lord turning their hearts to hate you.” Well, say you, you would have the Lord in everything. Yes, I would, in everything. **I would have him in his sovereignty in everything;** God in heaven and God in earth, everywhere. Nothing will strengthen the mind like this; nothing will make you so happy; the more you drink into this spirit the better. I have known some of the Lord’s people highly favored in this, and they have been laughed at for it; but I have watched them, and they have been the happiest after all. One said to me some time ago, “I have been pushed about so and so, and I have been happy all through; I believe it is the Lord.” A Christian friend said, “Oh, you think it is the Lord; you make this and that mistake, and attribute it to the Lord.” No,” he said, “I do not attribute my mistakes to the Lord, but he suffers me to make them.” And I was asked whether I thought this person did not go too far, in thus recognizing the Lord in suffering, and sorrow, and everything. No, I said, I thought he did not go far enough. I said, If one hair fall from my head, that is from the Lord; yes, he keeps the number, and every time I lose one, why, it is the Lord. He keeps the number, and I lose one today, why, the Lord knows it, because he knows how many I have; I don’t myself, I have not counted them. **Recognize the Lord in everything; there is no safety, no happiness, no peace, no blessedness, without him.** It was Abraham’s safety, and Jacob’s consolation. “I will be with thee in all places, and not leave you, bring you again to this land.” It was the consolation of the holy apostles. “Lo, I am with you always;” that would include all places and all circumstances; “even unto the end of the world.” Such, then, was Rahab’s creed.

Second, I notice her *integrity*. **Now, where there is this faith that I have noticed, good works will follow.** First, integrity, she took care of the spies. Ah! say you, she told two untruths. She did, and jeopardized her life in so doing. The king sent and said, “There are men come unto you, bring them forth.” “Well,” she said, “men came, but I do not know whence they came.” That was not true. No, it was not. “And about the time it got dark, and the gate was about to be shut, they went out, but I do not know where they have gone to; you had better pursue after them.” **Now here are two falsehoods.** Now, then, some of you **hypocrites**⁶, get your piety ready, for I am going to shock

⁶ These remarks are by the Puritan John Owen, a champion, Goliath like, of the duty faith majority. They are inserted here for several reasons. First to show, as James Wells himself expressed, the utter **hypocrisy** of many who adamantly insist that Rahab’s lies were sinful and evil. Secondly to show what any clear thinking, honest, seeker after the truth must of necessity see from the way the New Testament portrays Rahab. Thirdly, as a clear example of the conclusions someone, completely independent of this controversy, came to. I know that James Wells was no friend of John Calvin. To my knowledge he was no friend of John Owen either. This makes Owens statements all the more pertinent. As Owen shows Rahab acted righteously (“That it was in itself lawful, just, and good, has been declared”), therefore, she acted without sin. As any worthy minister should, James Wells put meat on the bones to feed his flock. For this he was condemned by his peers.

Any emphasis is mine, to aid the reader. I have edited the some of the old English words to make this as understandable as possible.

He is here dealing with Hebrews 11:31: ‘By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that believed not, [or were disobedient, when she had received the spies with peace.]’

Point number 5: Rahab, as soon as it was possible, made an excellent confession of her faith, and of the means of her conversion to God. This confession is recorded at large, Joshua 2:9-11. She avows the Lord Jehovah to be the only “God in heaven above, and in earth beneath;” wherein she renounced all the idols which before she had worshipped, verse 11. And she avows her faith in him as their God, or the God of Israel, who had taken them to be his people by promise and covenant; which in this confession she lays hold on by faith: “The LORD your God, he is God.” And she declares the means of her conversion; which was her hearing of the mighty works of God, and what he did for his people, verse 10. And she adds, in addition to this, the way and means whereby her faith was confirmed, namely, her observation of the effect which the report of these things had upon the minds and hearts of her wicked countrymen: ‘Their hearts hereon did melt, and they had no more courage left in them,’ verse 11. As she had an experience of the divine power of grace in producing a contrary effect in her, namely, that of faith and obedience; so, she plainly saw that there was the hand of God in that dread, terror, and fear, which fell upon her countrymen. Their hearts did melt, faint, fall down: and it is an infallible rule in all affairs, especially in war, “They that fall in their hearts and spirits, fall from everything that is good, useful, or helpful.” By observing these things her faith was confirmed. So, on the first occasion after her conversion, she made a good confession. Hereby the rule is confirmed which we have, Romans 10:10.

Point number 6: It is in **the nature of true, real, saving faith**, immediately, or at its first opportunity, to declare and explain itself in confession before men; or confession is absolutely inseparable from faith. Where men, on some light and convictions, do suppose themselves to have faith, yet through fear or shame do not come up to the ways of expressing it in confession prescribed in the Scripture, their religion is in useless. And therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Gospel, does constantly lay the same weight on confession as on believing itself, Matthew 10:33; Luke 9:26. And “the fearful,” that is, those who flee from public profession in times of danger and persecution, shall be no less assuredly excluded from the heavenly Jerusalem than unbelievers themselves, Revelation 21:8.

Point number 7: She separated herself from the cause and interest other own people among whom she lived, and joined herself unto the cause and interest of the people of God. **This also is a necessary fruit of faith, and an inseparable part of a profession. This God called her to do, this she complied with, and this was that which**

it a little. **Was Rahab justified in those falsehoods? Certainly, she was. Say you, Would you have told them? Yes, sir, I would tell ten thousand if I were placed in the same circumstances, and had the same divine authority for it that she had. She must either utter those falsehoods or else betray the spies, and their lives would have been lost. Then she could not have saved Jericho; it would have been destroyed all the same, and she would have been destroyed, and her father and mother, her brothers and sisters, would have been destroyed, and all would have been destroyed. Some say, Well, I have sometimes thought that she told those falsehoods by virtue of the law of hospitality; that in the East, when they receive a person as their guest, they feel bound to venture any and every thing for him. Well, Oriental customs are all very well in their**

rendered all that she did, in receiving, concealing, and preserving the spies, though they came in order unto the destruction of her country and people, just and warrantable. For although men may not leave the cause and interest of their own people to join with their enemies on light grounds or reasons, since the light of nature itself manifests how many obligations there are on us to seek the good of our own country, yet where the persons whereof it consists are obstinate idolaters, and the cause wherein they are engaged is wicked, and in direct opposition unto God, there a universal separation from them in interest, and a conjunction with their enemies, **is a duty, honorable and just, as it was in her.** Wherefore, although it may seem something difficult to accept, that she, being born and living in the town, a citizen of it, and subject of the king, **should studiously and industriously receive, conceal, give intelligence unto, and convey away in safety,** spies that came to find out a way for the total destruction of the place; yet she, **on the call and command of God,** having renounced an interest in and relation unto that wicked, idolatrous, unbelieving people, whom she knew to be devoted to utter destruction, it was **just and righteous in her** to be assisting unto their enemies.

Point number 8: This separation from the cause and interest of the world is required in all believers, and will accompany true faith wherever it is found. I speak not of the differences that may fall out between nations, and the conjunction in counsel and action with one people against another; for in such cases we cannot desert our own country without perfidious treachery, **unless warranted by such extraordinary circumstances as Rahab was under:** but I intend that wicked, carnal interest of the world, and its corrupt conversation, which all believers are obliged visibly to separate themselves from, as a necessary part of their profession.

Point number 9: **She showed, testified, manifested her faith by her works.** She “received the spies with peace.” In these few words does the apostle comprise the whole story of her receiving of them, **her studious concealing them,** the intelligence she gave them, **the prudence she used, the pains she took,** and the danger she underwent in the safe conveyance of them to their army; all which are at large recorded, Joshua 2. This work of hers is celebrated there, and also James 2, **as an eminent fruit and demonstration of that faith by which she was justified.** And so, it was. **That it was in itself lawful, just, and good, has been declared.** For what is not so cannot be rendered so to be on any other consideration. Again, it was a work of great use and importance to the church and cause of God. For had these spies been taken and slain, it would have put a great discouragement on the whole people, and made them question whether God would be with them in their undertaking or no. And it is evident that the tidings which they carried unto Joshua and the people, from the intelligence which they had by Rahab, was a mighty encouragement unto them. For they report their discovery in her words. They said unto Joshua, “Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us,” Joshua 2:24. And it was a work accompanied with the utmost hazard and danger unto herself. Had the matter been discovered, there is no doubt but that she, and all that she had, had been utterly destroyed. And all these things set a great luster upon this work, whereby she evidenced her faith and her justification thereby.

And as this instance is exceedingly apposite unto the purpose of the apostle, in arm and encourage believers against the difficulties and dangers which they were to meet withal in their profession; so it is sufficient to condemn multitudes among ourselves, who, after a long profession of the truth, are ready to tremble at the first approach of danger, and think it their wisdom to keep at a distance from them that are exposed to danger and sufferings.

place, but **we must not lay too much stress upon that; I choose to keep close to the blessed God.** Well, but say you, there are the falsehoods, and so how do you get over them? I will ask you a question or two. First, the shewbread was lawful for none but the priests; David did not even belong to the priestly tribe, yet ate the shewbread. Then how do you get over it? Oh, say you, won't you tell us? I don't think I ought. What saith the law? "Thou shalt do no manner of work on the sabbath day." "The priests profane the sabbath," mark that, "and are blameless." The Pharisees were confounded at that. Did not the Savior say so, that they profaned the sabbath, and were blameless? **Rahab from two principles uttered these falsehoods. First,** she was placed apparently between two evils; she must either inflict injury upon the cause of God, by destroying, which she would have done by admitting the spies were there, the lives of these two godly men; She must either do that, or else speak as she did; therefore, between the two evils she chose the

least. **But were not the untruths she told sinful? No, I believe not;**^{7, 8} I'll have a word upon that presently. **But, mind, we must be placed in analogous circumstances to tell an untruth with divine sanction.** I will not here give you a lecture upon the vice of lying, which is a dreadful vice,

⁷ As with our previous example from John Owen, this example from Matthew Henry agrees with James Wells teaching. "When she was examined concerning them, she denied they were in her house, turned off the officers that had a warrant to search for them with a sham, and so secured them. No marvel that the king of Jericho sent to enquire after them (v. 2, 3); he had cause to fear when the enemy was at his door, and his fear made him suspicious and jealous of all strangers. He had reason to demand from Rahab that she should bring forth the men to be dealt with as spies; **but Rahab not only disowned that she knew them, or knew where they were, but, that no further search might be made for them in the city, told the pursuers they had gone away** again and in all probability might be overtaken, v. 4, 5. Now, (1.) **We are sure this was a good work: it is canonized by the apostle (James 2:25), where she is said to be justified by works, and this is specified, that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way, and she did it by faith, such a faith as set her above the fear of man, even of the wrath of the king.** She believed, upon the report she had heard of the wonders wrought for Israel, that their God was the only true God, and that therefore their declared design upon Canaan would undoubtedly take effect and in this faith she sided with them, protected them, and courted their favour. Had she said, "I believe God is yours and Canaan yours, but I dare not show you any kindness," her faith had been dead and inactive, and would not have justified her. But by this it appeared to be both alive and lively, that she exposed herself to the utmost peril, even of life, in obedience to her faith. Note, Those only are true believers that can find in their hearts to venture for God; and those that by faith take the Lord for their God take his people for their people, and cast in their lot among them. **Those that have God for their refuge and hiding-place must testify their gratitude by their readiness to shelter his people when there is occasion.** Let my outcasts dwell with thee, Isa. 16:3, 4. And we must be glad of an opportunity of testifying the sincerity and zeal of our love to God by hazardous services to his church and kingdom among men. **But, (2.) There is that in it which it is not easy to justify, and yet it must be justified, or else it could not be so good a work as to justify her.** [1.] It is plain that she betrayed her country by harbouring the enemies of it, and aiding those that were designing its destruction, which could not consist with her allegiance to her prince and her affection and duty to the community she was a member of. But that which justifies her in this is that she knew the Lord had given Israel this land (v. 9), knew it by the incontestable miracles God had wrought for them, which confirmed that grant; and **her obligations to God were higher than her obligations to any other.** If she knew God had given them this land, it would have been a sin to join with those that hindered them from possessing it. But, since no such grant of any land to any people can now be proved, this will by no means justify any such treacherous practices against the public welfare. [2.] **It is plain that she deceived the officers that examined her with an untruth—That she knew not whence the men were, that they had gone out, that she knew not whither they had gone. What shall we say to this?** If she had either told the truth or been silent, she would have betrayed the spies, and this would certainly have been a great sin; and it does not appear that she had any other way of concealing them that by this ironical direction to the officers to pursue them another way, which if they would suffer themselves to be deceived by, let them be deceived. None are bound to accuse themselves, or their friends, of that which, though enquired after as a crime, they know to be a virtue. **This case was altogether extraordinary, and therefore cannot be drawn into a precedent; and that may be justified here which would be by no means lawful in a common case.** Rahab knew, by what was already done on the other side Jordan, that no mercy was to be shown to the Canaanites, **and thence inferred that, if mercy was not owing them, truth was not; those that might be destroyed might be deceived.** Yet divines generally conceive that it was a sin, which however admitted of this extenuation, that being a Canaanite she was not better taught the evil of lying; but God accepted her faith and pardoned her infirmity. **However it was in this case,** we are sure it is our duty to speak every man the truth to his neighbour, to dread and detest lying, and never to do evil, that evil, that good may come of it, Rom. 3:8. But God accepts what is sincerely and honestly intended, though there be a mixture of frailty and folly in it, and is not extreme to mark what we do amiss. Some suggest that what she said might possibly be true of some other men."

Henry, M. (1994). Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume (p. 292). Peabody: Hendrickson.

as you all know. But it is the peculiarity of the circumstances in times past; and even now I could easily show you we may be placed in circumstances where such untruths, which untruths would do no one harm, would be commended. Did she injure any one? If by exposing the spies she could have saved her country, there might have been some plausibility about it; but it would not; Jericho would have been destroyed all the same, and she too, and, as I have said, her house as well. Now then, to be careful here for a moment, I will tell you a doctrine I hold, and I may as well bring it to light; a little open air will do it no harm. **I hold this doctrine; that in the physical, in the moral, and in the spiritual world the great God can suspend for a time any law he chooses.** When the sun stood still, some physical laws we do not understand were suspended; when the sea was divided, physical laws we do not understand were suspended; so, when Jordan was divided. In all the Savior's miracles there were physical laws suspended, and other laws put into their place we cannot understand. The literal law of things was for the loaves and fishes to remain as they were; but to suspend that law, and, by some other law we do not understand multiplied those loaves and fishes into what you read of. And just so in the moral world; **God here suspended the law of falsehood, and by suspending that law did hereby take away the criminality of Rahab's falsehoods;** that though she told two falsehoods there was no sin in them, no crime in them; necessity demanded it; God suspended the usual law of truth, and made that morally true which was literally false; that is, Rahab did not choose to know whence the spies came, or whither they went, and in the exercise of this right she was justified; hereby suspended one law to make way for another. What cannot the great God do? "Do to others as you would-they should do to you" is a law existing among creatures of equality; but God has not his equal; he has no other to do to, as he is done to. Why, say some, you seem to rejoice in it. Of course, I do. **I would rather lose the last drop of my blood any day than give up one iota of Jehovah's right,** absolute, original, and moral right, as the great original, inconceivable God, to do just what he pleases. There are some laws he will not suspend; the law of his love, never alter that; the law of salvation; not because he cannot, be careful how you attribute can not to the great God. God cannot lie because he will not. There is a man, and a good man too he is, he says that the damnation of a soul is the will of God's nature, but that salvation is the nature of his will. That may do for logicians, but it is horrible divinity. What! is God sounder the control of his nature that he is from necessity compelled to damn to eternity a living soul? **I hate any doctrine that brings the blessed God into any sort of bondage,** except into that solemn engagement wherein he has willingly bound himself, having sworn by himself, and that from his own choice. Oh, my hearer, remember what a poor worm, what a poor creature you are, and that you are yet in the body, and though all may have been straight with you so far, God alone knows, before the next week shall terminate, what may overtake

⁸ Douglas Moo's comments on James 2:25 are important in relation to Rahab's faith. "Just in case his readers have missed the point, James adds one final illustration. If it might be objected that Abraham's works were no more than what might be expected from one who had so richly experienced God's grace, the same is certainly not true of Rahab. With little basis for her belief, she had become convinced that 'the LORD your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath' (Josh. 2:11). And on the basis of this 'faith' she received the messengers and sent them out another way. To be sure, James does not specifically mention her faith, but it is clear from his entire argument that he assumes it. Significantly, Hebrews 11:31 singles her out as an example of faith. James' point here, then, is the same as he has made in the similarly worded verse 21: God's final judgment takes into consideration the actual righteousness that a person exhibits through works. The participles received (hypodexamenē) and sent out (ekbalousa) are aorists, specifying the works which were the basis for God's ultimate verdict."

you, physically, morally, or circumstantially. Oh, there is no certainty. Therefore, despise not what I am now saying, that thy God watches over you with an infinity of care, and that he is at liberty to do just what he pleases. Admit that one truth, and then, if you cannot understand the circumstances, adopt Dr. Watts's position,

“But O my soul, if truth so bright
Dazzle and confound thy sight,
Yet still his written will obey,
And wait the great decisive day.”

I am going further yet. The apostle James makes that part of her conduct the best part of her conduct. I told you to get your piety ready, you hypocrites, for that I was going to shock it. **The apostle James makes that the best part of her conduct.** I look back with pleasure upon some of the favors I have done some of the people of God, and would again, and will tomorrow too, if I am so placed. James says, “Was not Rahab justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” How did she do that? Why, by saying they were not there, and by saying they were gone. The apostle makes that the best part of her conduct. Here, then, were two falsehoods, with no sin in them, as I have said; they did no one any harm. **To tell a truth that would injure the people of God is infinitely worse than telling a lie that would not injure them no question about that.**

Now let us look at *her manifold success*, passing by *her prayer*, and yet noticing it too; though I regret I have not time to dwell upon it as I had intended. “Now,” she said to the spies, “Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness that you will also show kindness unto my father's house.” See how the grace of God brought all the best of her affections up. Degraded as she had been in times past, it had not eradicated the fine feelings, filial and family feelings. “That you will save alive my father and my mother.” What! a poor degraded thing like, you love your father. Ah I have broken his heart; I feel it the more now. “That you will save alive my father and my mother, and my brethren and my sisters, and all that they have.” Here was a family feeling revived; earnest affection, and earnest prayer. And they by the Holy Ghost fell in with the petition, confirmed her wish; So, she succeeded in obtaining from them that which she knew would be a security. “Swear unto me by the Lord;” swear in that name that is infallible, and then I know, as Israelites, your oath will be the oath of the Lord, and by that oath I shall be safe. And they did swear, and she accepted the oath; and that saved her! “Go,” said Joshua, “and bring out the woman, and all that she has, as you swore unto her.” Second, she succeeded in getting her father and mother, and sisters and brothers, into the house, and perhaps, more distant relatives as well. So, every Christian prays for those near and dear to him in the ties of nature. And as Rahab here succeeded temporally, may we not, hope we shall, though the answer may seem long delayed, succeed eternally? And mark another point of this oath; “Whosoever;” the men. said, “shall be with thee, in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.” What a beautiful representation these spies are of Christ! Christ won't allow any hand to be finally upon his people. He will come to sin, and world, and say, “Hands off!” to the enemies, and say, “Hands off!” to tribulation and say, “Hands off!” to death, and say, “Hands off!” No hand shall be upon thy soul to hurt it; it shall be in the hand of thy Elder Brother, in the hand of thy Heavenly Father. Out of the hands of all he will pluck thee; but none shall pluck thee from the strength of Israel's hand., And she also succeeded in keeping the secret. There are some people so slack-brained and so

flippant that they can't keep a thing in their minds five minutes hardly: no sooner in than out. Now I advise you all to be aware of such, who come, into your house, and tell you all about other, people; let that be their last visit: have nothing more to do with them; beware of them; their infamous tongues will get you into infinite mischief, depend upon it. Now she kept her self-possession. Also, she succeeded in keeping the scarlet thread, or line, rather, in the window, not afraid to own it, a beautiful figure of God's truth, the line of truth; you will keep that. She succeeded in staying in the house. And then, when she was saved, she was left outside the camp of Israel. Ah, say you, that is very bad, that is, left outside the camp. "Well, but you and I were at first. I was outside the church first; some of you are outside the camp now; you do not come, to join the church yet. So, she was left outside first, joined the church afterwards, the same as some now. Again, she succeeded in becoming a part of Israel, married by a prince, and became one of the ancestresses of the Lord Jesus Christ, interwoven into the genealogy, of heaven, interwoven into the most wondrous genealogy in existence. And in this she is a representative of all the people of God; they are interwoven in the genealogy of the great registry of heaven, the Lamb's book, of eternal life. And she succeeded in acquiring a place in the New Testament in the very first chapter; there she is, in the genealogy of the first chapter of the New Testament. What is she put there for?