

Moving Beyond Our Past

We've all had those moments when we did something we wish would be forgotten.

- Were you the four-year-old boy who walked the aisle at the wedding roaring loudly because you were the ring bear?
- Were you the young girl who saw Uncle Murray's large girth and asked him in front of everyone, "Are you pregnant?"
- Were you the one who heard some cuss words in elementary school and proceeded to use them the following week at a church event?
- Were you the teenager who thought it would be funny to shoot off fireworks in front of the police station—in a city where fireworks are banned? (Um ... this last one may have been me.)

These moments would stay buried in the past if it wasn't for holidays, reunions, and other large family gatherings. There's that one obnoxious cousin who likes to remind everyone, "Hey, you all remember when Earl here thought he was Superman and ran around with a towel for a cape.? (Yuck, yuck.) Earl, if I get you a towel, will you do it again?"

Everyone has a good laugh at your expense. I'm sure they don't mean anything malicious, but your protests fall on deaf ears: *"Good grief! I was four years old! I'm not the same person!"*

It's bad enough to be reminded you once got your head stuck between the rails of a balcony, but that's nothing compared to being reminded you were a prostitute. If you've ever heard a sermon about Jericho and the spies you heard a reference to Rahab the prostitute. Not Rahab, but Rahab the prostitute, as if that's her full name.

When Rahab helped the Israelite spies, her life changed with that encounter—both spiritually or vocationally. She saw an opportunity to express her belief in the God of the Hebrews, and she experienced faith and grace. We don't know how old she was when this changed occurred, but she was forever known by her old occupation.

We don't refer to Moses the murderer (Ex. 2:11-12), David the adulterer (2 Sam. 11), or Paul the blasphemer (1 Tim. 1:13). But Rahab is almost always Rahab the prostitute. Granted, we don't know much about Rahab after this initial act in Jericho (Josh. 2), but she surely moved on to bigger and better things. For one, she became an example of great faith. "By faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed" (Heb. 11:31).

I see something of even greater significance. Because of her faith, her life changed. She became a wife and mother, and a

lot of key people looked back to her as their ancestor: King David, King Solomon, and Jesus Christ. She's listed in the family tree of Jesus.

"Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered King David" (Matt. 1:5-6).

Rahab's past didn't define who she became.

In a recent study in *Bible Studies for Life*, we noted Charles Colson as a great Christian thinker. This did not set well with one man who sent me this email:

"To my utter astonishment, Charles Colson's name appears on this list. The one and same Nixonian henchman during the Watergate scandal. This man was convicted of obstruction of justice and served time in prison. He was very fortunate that he was not convicted of more serious crimes. ... This man may have repented, but he hurt (not physically) a lot of people with his dirty tricks escapades during the Watergate era. In my 70 years, I have never heard this man called a great Christian thinker."

Here's my response:

"No one would disagree with you regarding the role Colson played in a dark period of American history. Yet for almost 40 years, Colson lived a life of commitment to Christ. After his own prison sentence, he was committed to taking the gospel into prisons, a ministry that has continued even after his death. And his books are good. I have read most of his writings, and he never played off his Watergate notoriety; he was committed to exalting Christ and challenging the church to do the same."

"I am reminded of the Apostle Paul, whose past was full of hate and murder against Christ and His followers. Yet God saved him and transformed his life. I am thankful God has forgiven my past, and is willing to use me for His kingdom."

I imagine every time Paul's past was brought up, he was reminded of how far the grace of God had brought him. I think the same could've been said for Colson. And when I think of the transformation in my own life ... I don't glory in my past, but the reminder of my past leads me to glory in Christ who changed me.

A prostitute, a blasphemer, a Watergate henchman, and an obnoxious high school kid (that would be me). Our past does not define us.

Your past does not define you either. Your relationship with Christ does.

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