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***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is***  
***Unlikely Heroes***  
**Joshua 1-4**  
**November 12, 2017, Jeff Germo**

Today we are starting the book of Joshua. We are jumping over Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They all cover the same time period as the Exodus and fill in a lot of blanks. If you haven't ever read those it would be a good idea to read through them so you have a clearer idea of the storyline.

So far, in the biblical narrative, what we have seen is that God is up to something. God's story is moving purposefully through history to a final conclusion where he will one day vanquish all sin, evil, death and Satan. That is what the entire biblical narrative is about.

What we saw in Genesis was that, since the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden, God initiated his plan by calling Abraham and Sarah to be the start of a nation who would work with God to bless all nations of the world by restoring the *shalom* that was lost in the Garden. If you missed some of the sermons, make sure you go back and watch the videos on our website.

That nation of people ended up, providentially, being held captive as slaves in Egypt for over four hundred years. God raised up Moses to lead them miraculously out of captivity. The nation of Israel left Egypt and then, because of their stubborn hearts, ended up wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Moses died and Joshua took over the leadership. They were now on the east side of the Jordan River. God made them a promise that he was going to give them the land to the west of the Jordan. The problem was that there were some hostile people on the other side who were not willing to allow the Israelites to settle there.

If you are new to the Bible and you have been following along by reading the narrative leading up to each sermon, you will likely have come across some very difficult passages that seem incongruent with the God we have been describing as a God of love, grace, freedom, and hope.

I grew up in the church. I have heard these stories for as long as I can remember. As a kid we heard stories of the battles, and Joshua and the Israelites marching around Jericho and the walls falling down. The stories were all sanitized for kids, and we sang songs about them. For very good reason, they had none of the really hard stuff. Since then I've read the narrative numerous times and it never gets easier. There are some things that are just plain difficult to stomach. There is so much violence, and what looks like, with a cursory reading, cultural and ethnic genocide. So, before we go on, we need to just touch on that, otherwise it's going to be very distracting for some of you.

Any critic of the Bible, or of the God of the Bible, will look at the Old Testament and the violence and seeming ethnic cleansing and will say things like, "It's no different than what ISIS is doing all over the world." Richard Dawkins, arguably the most famous atheist and extreme critic of religion and the Bible, wrote in his book, *The God Delusion*:

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**“The ethnic cleansing begun in the time of Moses is brought to bloody fruition in the book of Joshua, a text remarkable for the bloodthirsty massacres it records and the xenophobic relish with which it does so.”**

Dawkins describes the Old Testament God as xenophobic. Let's define xenophobia.

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**xenophobia** | **zɛnəˈfəʊbiə** | **noun** *[mass noun]* **dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries.**

So, xenophobia is ethnocentricity to the extreme. Is that what the Old Testament is? Is it a xenophobic manifesto to ethnically cleanse Canaan of anyone but Jews? Is that what the God of the Bible is like? Is that the mission he gave Israel? Let's find out by taking a look at some other passages. In this first passage, God, through Moses is telling the people how to live when they get into the land across the Jordan.

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**Leviticus 19:10 (NLT)**

***<sup>10</sup> It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God.***

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**Leviticus 19:33–34 (NLT)**

***<sup>33</sup> “Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. <sup>34</sup> Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.***

That is how God taught the people of Israel to treat those who were not like them. They were to love them as they loved themselves. And we need to remember, God told them this before the conquest, to prepare them for living in the land. So, Dawkin's assertion that the Old Testament is xenophobic is clearly wrong. So, what is going on then because at first glance it certainly does appear to be xenophobic.

To be sure, there is a whole lot of violence in the Old Testament and it does seem incongruent with what Jesus taught in the Gospels and what Paul and the other writers taught in the New Testament letters. Jesus, after all, is the one who said we are to love our enemies, turn the other cheek, bless those who curse us, which is another thing that atheists like Richard Dawkins think is ridiculous.

Before we go on to look at our text let me just quickly point out some things that might help in understanding these very difficult passages.

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**1. The Bible describes many things that it does not necessarily endorse.**

There are many crazy, violent stories that are described in the Bible that are not prescriptive of how God would have wanted them to behave. The Bible just honestly recorded what happened, which actually lends a whole lot of credibility to the Bible. It does not sanitize what really happened.

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## 2. You can't jump into the middle of a story and expect to understand.

If you jump into any story in the middle without reading the beginning and the end, you will undoubtedly miss the point. So, simply reading a part of Joshua, without reading the beginning and the end, or even reading all of Joshua without reading the beginning of the Bible and the end of the Bible, will lead to massive misunderstanding. You need to know the whole story with a bird's eye view.

Joshua opens up with a story about a Canaanite prostitute, named Rahab, and her family. This Gentile prostitute was saved by the Israelites. That is only a part of the story. Rahab is so important to what God is doing in saving the world that she is actually mentioned in the Gospels in the New Testament. We'll take a look at this later. The book of Joshua opens with this amazing story to show that God longed to save the Canaanites, not destroy them.

There is an event that is recorded in chapter 5 that is quite interesting.

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### Joshua 5:13–14 (ESV)

***13 When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" 14 And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord."***

His answer to both questions was, ***"No!"*** In the NLT, the NIV and some other translations it has Joshua asking, ***"Are you friend or foe?"*** The commander answers ***"Neither."*** I like the ESV better here. ***"Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"*** The answer came back, ***"No!"*** This was an angel of the Lord who spoke to Joshua, a commander of Yahweh's angels. God was not against the Canaanites. The mission he gave the Israelites was not to empower the them at the expense of the Canaanites. That is clear. So, there must have been some other rationale for their conquest. The answer is in Deuteronomy.

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### Deuteronomy 9:4–6 (NLT)

***4 "After the Lord your God has done this for you, don't say in your hearts, 'The Lord has given us this land because we are such good people!' No, it is because of the wickedness of the other nations that he is pushing them out of your way. 5 It is not because you are so good or have such integrity that you are about to occupy their land. The Lord your God will drive these nations out ahead of you only because of their wickedness, and to fulfill the oath he swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."***

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***6 You must recognize that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land because you are good, for you are not—you are a stubborn people."***

The violence done by the Israelites, and directed by God, was not because of the righteousness of the Jews. The nations in Canaan were so wicked and corrupt that they needed to be stopped. In God's infinite wisdom, the only way to stop it was to wipe them out. That may seem very harsh and very difficult to understand from a human perspective, but we

need to know that this was not ethnic cleansing, or cultural genocide. God dearly loved the Canaanites and did not want them to perish.

Some of you might remember reading in Genesis when Sodom and Gomorrah had become so wicked that God told Abraham he was going to wipe them out. Abraham argued with God asking, "What if I could find 50 righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, would you wipe out the righteous with the unrighteous?" God, said, "Okay, if you can find 50 righteous people I will not destroy the cities." Abraham continued to negotiate with God and God humoured him. "So, what if I can find 45, or 40, or 30...?" And he negotiated all the way down to five people. God said that he would save the cities if only five righteous people could be found. Many of you know the story. Not even five righteous people could be found in the entire cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God knew. We need to leave that to God's wisdom.

Or, how about the story of Jonah where God sent Jonah to save the Assyrian Gentile city of Nineveh. Jonah didn't want to go. He hated the Ninevites. God reprimanded Jonah for his callous attitude towards a people he desperately wanted to save. That story had a happy ending. Jonah reluctantly went and preached to Nineveh about the God who wanted to save them. They repented and turned to God. And Jonah got angry at God because of his compassion towards Nineveh.

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Jonah 4:1–2 (NLT)

***<sup>1</sup> This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. <sup>2</sup> So he complained to the Lord about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people."***

Jonah knew what God was like. He knew that if people sought refuge in God he would save them. That is what God is like. Here is how God responded to Jonah's little temper tantrum.

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Jonah 4:11 (NLT)

***<sup>11</sup> ...Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?"***

We need to know that this is what God is like if we are going to understand these very difficult passages.

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2 Peter 3:9 (NLT)

***<sup>9</sup> The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.***

That is what God is like. This is why we put so much effort into reaching out to our community in so many ways. This is why we ask you, unapologetically, to give sacrificially so the mission of Jesus can be accomplished in Campbell River and around the world. This is why we are doing the Giving Challenge. It's why we do River Kids. It's why we do Operation Christmas

Child. It's why we support Ngorika. It's why we give to many missionaries around the world, because God wants to save people. We need to know this is true if we are going to understand these difficult passages from the Old Testament. That is what God is like.

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### **3. The ancient Near Eastern social milieu needs to be taken into account to understand what is going on.**

No one in the that time, and in that place, would have needed to find some sort of moral justification for taking someone's land. That is just what it was like then. As hard as that sounds to us, it was the world they lived in. That is what it was like - period.

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### **4. Israel was not expansionist.**

At first glance it seems like this is not true. However, if you read through the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, you can clearly see that Israel did not continue expanding past the borders God gave them. God promised them land. They knew he had called them for a specific time and place and then they stopped their conquest once the land God promised them was taken. That means there is no justification for "holy war" any longer. That period of history is done.

In the 19th century the slogan, Manifest Destiny became very popular. It was the belief that claimed that the USA and its white, "Christian" citizens were chosen by God, and therefore entitled to any land they pleased, despite who already owned it. That belief led to many atrocities against the Native Americans. Canada has been guilty of the same sins against our First Nations people. I want to say to all my First Nations friends, "I am so sorry." There is never justification for that kind of, so called, "holy war" - ever.

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### **5. The Old Testament narrative must be read through the lens of the New Testament.**

Remember, **God is up to something. Satan is up to something.**

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And we, **left to our own devices, without the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, most naturally move away from God.** It's no wonder then, that things got so bad in the Old Testament that God needed to take some serious action.

Since the advent of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost a new era was ushered in. God's plan of restoring his *shalom* to his creation is well on it's way. Just as in the Old Testament he called the Israelites to become a nation who would be a blessing to all the nations, so Jesus has called us, as his disciples in Campbell River to be a blessing to those around us.

We have a holy war to fight as well, but here is what the Apostle Paul said about that to the Jesus followers in Ephesus:

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### **Ephesians 6:10–12 (NLT)**

***<sup>10</sup> A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities***

***of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.***

We have to always remember that God is all about restoring his *shalom*, and Satan is all about destroying it. What has Jesus called us to? Grow in love, even to the point of loving our enemies, turn the other cheek, push back the gates of hell. Our battle is a spiritual one and we must know that the battle is fierce.

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That was a very long introduction to our passage, but I thought it was vital to deal with this at the outset so we can focus in on the main message here. We don't have time to read all of Joshua 1-4 this morning, so I will summarize it and then highlight a part of it.

As I said earlier, we are jumping right over Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They all take place during the period of the Exodus and are all about God preparing his people to cross over to the west side of the Jordan River to take possession of the land of Canaan that he promised Abraham in Genesis 12.

Moses had died and had prepared Joshua to succeed him as leader. Joshua told the people to get ready to cross over. The people assured Joshua that they would obey him just as they obeyed Moses before him, which I am sure was exceedingly comforting for Joshua to hear.

Joshua sent a couple of spies to go and check out the city of Jericho across the Jordan to see what they were up against. The people of Jericho were afraid of Israel because they had heard of what God did through them in Egypt. The spies found a very unlikely ally in a Gentile prostitute named Rahab. We'll come back to this in a couple minutes and camp out there for a while.

The spies returned to the east side of the Jordan and reported to Joshua and the people that Jericho is ripe to take because all the people were in fear of them. Joshua gave them instructions that the priests were to carry the Ark of the Covenant ahead while the people followed.

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If you haven't read through Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy make sure you do so you can get a handle on what happened. God gave the people explicit instructions on building a tabernacle and all the pieces of worship. This included the Ark of the Covenant, which was a box overlaid with gold, containing the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's staff, and a jar of manna. The Ark represented the Presence of God.

In the Old Testament, God's people did not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. God chose to localize his presence. We don't have time to go into this, but today, since Pentecost in Acts 2, followers of Jesus have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Paul said that we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

So, the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan River. When they stepped into the Jordan the river stopped flowing and walled up upstream while the priests stood in the river bed. They stood there holding the Ark until all the people crossed over. Once all the people were safely across, the priests came out of the river and it started flowing again.

That's as far as we are going to get today, but let's back up a bit and look at Rahab. She is an unlikely hero in this part of God's salvation narrative. She was a Gentile, a Canaanite woman who, among all the people in Jericho, decided to take refuge in Yahweh.

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**Psalm 34:8 (NLT)**

***8 Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!***

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**Psalm 34:22 (NLT)**

***22 But the Lord will redeem those who serve him. No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.***

No one who takes refuge in the Lord will be condemned. No one. Paul said the same thing to the Roman Jesus followers:

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**Romans 10:13 (NLT)**

***13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

So, in our passage we have Rahab, the Gentile prostitute, who sees that Yahweh is a God who is different than all the other so called gods that her people worshipped. She laid herself at the mercy of the one true God and he willingly saved her and used her to something great. That is a great story.

You may be here thinking that God couldn't use you. You might be thinking that you don't have any great gifts, or that you are too shy or fearful. Or you may think that you have a history that is less than stellar and makes you somehow unusable to God. That is so untrue. We have many stories at CRBC of God taking people who have those same kinds of feelings about themselves and God has taken them, healed them, and has given them something meaningful to do in his kingdom.

I am an example of that. I have a history of lots of failure and well into my adult years I thought God would pass me over because I wasn't good enough. The beautiful thing for all of us is that, just like Rahab and the people of Israel, it doesn't depend on our stellar histories. It doesn't depend on us at all, except that we need to throw ourselves at the mercy of a God who is gracious and will accept and use anyone who takes refuge in him.

That is an amazing truth that we can learn through Rahab. But, it's not even the most exciting part of her story. If you follow her genealogy you see something pretty fantastic.

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**Matthew 1:5 (NLT)**

***5 Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse.***

This is a genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew. And if you follow that genealogy down to the end here's what you see:

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## Matthew 1:16 (NLT)

***<sup>16</sup> Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.***

What does this mean? Rahab, the Gentile prostitute was a part of the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. She was a part of salvation history. Remember, there are three threads that weave their way through all history, the main thread is painted with the blood of Jesus. It is a scarlet thread.

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**1. God is up to something.** He is moving history to a final conclusion where Satan, sin, evil, and death will one day be vanquished. He came to earth on the greatest rescue mission ever, to save humankind by dying in our place.

The greatest part of this story is that God saved Rahab and used her as part of his plan to bring the Messiah to save the world.

The spies Joshua sent to scope out Jericho found a safe place to hide out on the roof of Rahab's house. She told them she believed that Yahweh was the true God and asked if they would spare her family. They came up with a plan. Speaking to Rahab, they said,

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## Joshua 2:18 (NLT)

***<sup>18</sup> When we come into the land, you must leave this scarlet rope hanging from the window through which you let us down. And all your family members—your father, mother, brothers, and all your relatives—must be here inside the house.***

How cool is that? Who's the real hero in this story? It's the same as in all the other stories. It's God. Rahab was a part of God's plan to save the world. That scarlet thread shows up in every part of the biblical narrative.

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**God is up to something**, and it's pretty fantastic and mindblowing. **He is still at work. He will redeem anyone and everyone who takes refuge in him.**

He is using us at Campbell River Baptist Church to reach out to our community. He wants us to purposefully get in the game and take refuge in him so he can use us as part of his plan to save the world. I don't know about you, but the more I see God at work in his Word, the more I see the possibilities he has for us to be a part of his amazing plan in Campbell River and around the world. I am getting more and more excited by what I see him doing here through you.





***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is  
Unlikely Heroes  
Joshua 1-4  
Week of November 12, 2017***

**Objective of this study:** To see how God is at work in history, and today, and how he uses the most unlikely people, including us, to accomplish his purposes.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 34:1-8** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

**Welcome (5 minutes)**

When you were growing up, who was the person you took the most seriously?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

**Word/Work (45-60 minutes)**

1. Read Psalm 31:19.  
Does anything about this verse seem contradictory?  
Do you normally take refuge in someone (NIV) or go to someone for protection (NLT) if you are afraid of them?  
  
Read the verse again, thinking of fearing God as taking him seriously. Why, if we took God seriously, would we take refuge in him, or entrust ourselves to him?
2. Read, or listen to on your handy Bible app, Joshua chapters 1 - 4.
3. Rahab and the spies:
  1. Who did Rahab take more seriously -- the king of Jericho (2:2-3), or Yahweh (the LORD) (2:8-11)?
  2. What did she know about Yahweh (see the end of 2:11)?
  3. What did she do, as a result?
  4. Who do you take seriously, and what do you do as a result?
4. The Israelites and the stones:
  1. How do you think the events of chapters 3 and 4 affected the Israelites?
  2. If you had been there, how would those experiences have affected you?

3. Why did God tell them to collect stones from the riverbed? See 4:4-7.
4. Why was it important for them, and future generations, to remember what happened? See 4:21-24.
5. Yahweh and non-Israelites:
  1. How do we know that God cared about non-Israelites, even in the Old Testament? See a) Leviticus 19:10, 33-34 and b) Jonah 4:1-2, 11.
6. What is Yahweh like?
  1. What are some things you've seen about what God is like, through this story?
  2. Here are some to consider:
    - He saves everyone who takes refuge in him. See Psalm 34:8, Psalm 34:22, Psalm 31:19, Proverbs 29:25, Romans 10:13.
    - He uses 'unlikely heroes' such as Rahab. See Joshua chapter 2, Matthew 1:5, 16.
    - He wants us to remember who he is, what he is like, and what he has done for us, so that we will take him seriously, entrust ourselves to him, and walk with him. See Joshua 4:24.
  3. Which of these things is God's Spirit impressing on you the most?
7. What do you need/want to remind yourself of this week? Consider things from this study and also what stood out for you from the sermon.

### Prayer

1. Spend some time in prayer. Start by worshipping God for who he is and what he has done.
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
  - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
  - B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
  - C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
  - D. Our church finances. We are about \$40,000 behind. Pray that God would supply our needs so the mission can be carried on in Campbell River and around the world.
  - E. **Our missionary of the month:** - Jim & Kristi Miller with NAIM - check them out on our website and on the big chalkboard in the foyer. Pray about how you might be a part of supporting them.
  - F. **Our missionary of the week:** Luc and Denise Tetreault in Pakistan
  - G. **Local CR church:** Pastors Barry and Nancy Kardaal at the Vineyard Church