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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
“Sukkot - The Feast of Tabernacles”
February 25, 2018, Chris Coon

Good morning, it's good to see you again from up here. I sit up in the balcony most Sunday mornings so I normally see you from up there. It's been 4 years now since I decided to take a job at Sealand Aviation where I paint airplanes. I've painted 52 planes from all over the world since I started there and there seems to be no end in sight. It's a very busy industry and I really love what I do. It's a challenging and fun job. I enjoy getting to share my story and my faith sometimes with those that I work with whenever I can. I am a broken and imperfect person that God sometimes uses to sow his seed about the light and the truth of Jesus Christ. I am still learning how to share Christ in different ways and God is continually changing me and working in me in this way. It helps when I remember to pray everyday for God to fill me with the fruits of his spirit so that I can get better at sharing the love of Jesus with my life and with my words.

I'm really excited to share what I've been studying and preparing over the last couple of months with you this morning. We are going to be learning about harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles this morning. I always find it very humbling whenever I spend time focussed on God's Word because it is a reminder of how much time I could be devoted to knowing him better through it. The passages that we are going to look at today are really exciting and I've been anxious to share what I've learned with you.

When I first started exploring the Jewish holiday/celebration, the Feast of Tabernacles, I discovered that there are many passages in scripture that mention it. But, before we begin looking at the Biblical history I'd like to read this passage from the book of John chapter 4. In verses 31-36, the apostle John writes,

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John 4:31-36 (NLT)

“Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’ But Jesus replied, ‘I have a kind of food you know nothing about.’ ‘Did someone bring him food while we were gone?’ the disciples asked each other.

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Then Jesus explained: ‘My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.

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‘But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!’

Jesus Christ, the Creator of the harvest seasons and our Saviour and King, was calling his disciples then and now to work in his great spiritual harvest that results in eternal life with him. I don't consider myself a harvester of souls for the Kingdom of God. I've had many friends throughout my life that are definitely harvesters, that's their gift. I would say that I'm more of a sower. I don't have a list of people that I have led through to a prayer of salvation, but I have been a part of sowing God's seed with the spiritual gifts that he has given me. And so we all have to work together in this great spiritual harvest. We all have a part to play in this part of his story. God wants our relationship with him to be made whole and to be restored with peace like the perfect relationship that he had with Adam and Eve in the garden. The Feast of Tabernacles is a beautiful picture of how God wants to Tabernacle with us, his sheep, his children. He wants to be with us. Ultimately, God is preparing a place for us, his bride, to take part in a great wedding banquet with him where that relationship can finally be made whole

through his son, Jesus Christ. This morning, we are going to look briefly at the history of the Feast of Tabernacles, how it is celebrated presently, and what it means in the future for disciples of Jesus.

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THE HISTORY

First of all, the Feast of Tabernacles is referred to by several different names. On the Jewish calendar it is called Sukkot. In the Bible it is sometimes referred to as the Feast of Booths or Feast of the Ingathering. On January 7th, Pastor Jeff shared an incredible message about the Feast of First Fruits which is the third of the seven feasts that are celebrated on the Jewish calendar. It was on Mount Sinai that God gave Moses the dates and observances of the seven Biblical feasts.

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In order, they are named; Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles or Sukkot.

The Hebrew word Sukkot is literally Feast of Booths and it is celebrated from the 15th day to the 21st day of the 7th month which, on the Jewish calendar, is called Tishri. On our calendar it varies anywhere from the end of September to mid October. So, it occurs near the time we celebrate our Thanksgiving day.

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On January 31, 1957, the Governor General of Canada Vincent Massey issued a proclamation stating: **“A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed - to be observed on the second Monday in October.”**

Sukkot is one of the three central pilgrimage festivals, along with Passover Feast and the Feast of Pentecost.

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In preparation for this holiday it is traditional to build a Sukkah which is a temporary hut to live in during the holiday. It is the custom to buy a lulav, which is like a palm branch, and an etrog, which is like a bumpy lemon. You can shake or wave these daily throughout the festival. These Tabernacles or Sukkahs represent the Lord's shelter in the world to come, his great Tabernacle to exist in Jerusalem during the Kingdom Age. Ezekiel 37:26 tells us that the Lord will establish his Tabernacle in Jerusalem, and Zechariah 14:16-17 tells us that the world will come every year to appear before the King and worship him. We'll talk about the future harvest a little bit later.

The account of Sukkot in Exodus 34 marks the end of the harvest and the agricultural year. At the end of the harvest, the Israelites would thank God for providing for them by presenting crops and animals in the house of God according to the instructions that represented the terms of the covenant they had with God through Moses on Mt. Sinai. That's not something we do in North America. Generally, if anything grows from the soil in our gardens or farms in Canada, most of us attribute that growth to good planning, good weather, good chemicals, good seeds or good luck. In fact, we usually take all the credit and the bounty. In contrast, the Israelites in Biblical times would remember that it is God who allows food to be grown and harvested from the earth. They attribute all of this to God and thank him for it - they celebrate it for days.

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And the church in Scripture is compared to a harvest in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 where Paul says,

1 Corinthians 3:6-9 (NLT)

“I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering.

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What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building."

The Leviticus account of the feast of Tabernacles commemorates the exodus and the people of Israel's dependence on God's will. They celebrate and remember that it was God who delivered them out of Egypt through Moses and that it was God who provided for all of their needs in the desert for 40 years.

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In Leviticus 23:42-43 God says to Moses,

Leviticus 23:42-43 (NLT)

"For seven days you must live outside in little shelters. All native-born Israelites must live in shelters. This will remind each new generation of Israelites that I made their ancestors live in shelters when I rescued them from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

In the book of Numbers, the Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with 1 day of no regular work. I like that. That sounds like the start of my kind of festival.

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However, over the period of the 7 day celebration you were required to sacrifice, in total, 71 young bulls, 15 rams, 105 male lambs, 8 male goats, grain offerings, drink offerings, burnt offerings all according to the number specified on each day and fellowship offerings on the last and greatest day. So, although there was no regular work required, you were still kept very busy during this celebration. In fact, it must have been exhausting.

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Sukkot is the plural for the word Sukkah which means booth or tabernacle. A sukkah is the name of the temporary dwelling, like a hut, that farmers would live in during the harvest. It was a walled structure with palm leaves on top. It was kind of like their version of camping out, but they did this so that they could be thankful about God's provision in the desert.

The Israelites lived in booths like this in the desert and the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering or Booths was their way of celebrating that time and remembering God's provision. Doing this reminds them of how God took care of them and they celebrate and remember God's provision every year. It's an official Jewish holiday even today. They celebrate it with a tremendous amount of joy. The Israelites even decorated the inside of the Sukkah with pictures and beautiful artwork. So this is some of the history of Sukkot. Now we're going to look at what happens presently in Israel during Sukkot.

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THE PRESENT

Now let's look at how the Feast of Tabernacles is being celebrated today. What do Jewish people do now to celebrate Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles?

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I found a bulletin from a Temple online so let's look at the activities that the Temple Beth Miriam puts on throughout the week of Sukkot. You can see here that on October 1 the congregation starts to build the Sukkah at 10am. It says, "everyone is welcome as we build and decorate our beautiful Sukkah," so this is more of a communal Sukkah for the whole congregation. Then, on October 4 the Erev Sukkot Sisterhood Pasta Extravaganza begins at 5:30pm right after Religious School - doesn't that sound amazingly delicious! October 6 is the Board Sponsored Dinner, which sound more like a Baptist event, and Kabbalat Shabbat at 6:15. You will be served a delicious dinner and services will be held in the Sukkah - weather permitting. October 7 is the Havdallah and Barbeque for the whole family at 6pm - Havdallah, dinner, bonfire, fun. I think this is starting to sound a lot like Island Adventure Camp. On October 8 there is a Torah study in the Sukkah at 10am where you can learn in the shade - that doesn't

sound as much fun as the pasta extravaganza but, nonetheless, there continues to be event after event throughout the week and they celebrate today to remember how God provides for them. Isn't that beautiful.

Now, throughout the holiday, meals are eaten inside the Sukkah and many people sleep there as well. I'll bet it is popular for the Jewish children because it's always fun when you're young to sleep outside. It's probably not as comfortable or fun for the adults though I bet. When my kids were younger and Tammie and I took them camping in our dome tent, it was never as comfortable as sleeping in our beds at home. I always woke up kind of stiff and sore and having to go to the washroom in the middle of the night when you're camping with kids is like a total nightmare. Bad things can happen. My kids were always so excited though, they never cared about being comfortable - we were together, camping, and that's all that mattered.

In 2018, Sukkot begins at sundown on Sunday, Sept. 23 and lasts until sundown on Sunday, Sept. 30, so you can watch for that as we get closer to this celebration. What we've seen so far throughout the Biblical history and what's happening presently is that the Feast of Tabernacles is about remembering God's faithfulness in our past. Forgetting God is what got Israel in trouble in the wilderness.

Forgetting God and moving away from God is what we naturally want to do. We think that we can celebrate and have a feast without God, but we only move ourselves farther away from his peace, his tabernacle. That's why it's so important to look at what happens next in his story. What is God's plan in the future for his children?

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THE FUTURE

So, what does all this mean for Christians? And why is it important for believers, disciples of Christ, to be familiar and study all of this? Why do we need to know this and how do our hearts need to change? First of all, Jesus Christ is central to God's story. He is the most important figure because Jesus Christ is the first of the first fruits in God's spiritual harvest and he is the Living Water that we need, to be made whole so that we can Tabernacle with God and have peace with him.

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1 Corinthians 15:20 (NLT)

"But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died."

The first fruits of the agricultural harvest were the first grains and fruits to ripen and were offered to God. In the same way, Jesus Christ is the perfect spiritual first fruit and he is the first to be resurrected to eternal life. God created us and is growing his Kingdom so that he can eventually harvest us.

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James 1:18 (NLT)

"He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession."

So, sometime soon, in the future - we don't know when, but at just the right time, God is going to have his own colossal harvest. It will be the greatest and most important harvest of all time. He's not going to harvest grain, or wheat, or lambs, or cows or anything agricultural. God is going to harvest us from the earth! Jesus Christ is going to return and harvest humans, his people. The great shepherd is going to gather his sheep. This should fill us with so much joy and peace. In the book of John chapter 10 verses 2 and 3, Jesus tells the Jewish people,

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John 10:2-3 (NLT)

“But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out”

They didn’t understand what he was saying so in verse 7 Jesus says,

John 10:7 (NLT)

“I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. And again, in verse 11, Jesus says,

John 10:11 (NLT)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.” And again, in verse 14,

John 10:14 (NLT)

“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep and they know me.”

You would think after hearing all of this they would understand, but how do they respond? Verse 20 says,

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John 10:20 (NLT)

“Some said, ‘He’s demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?’”

When I’m at work at the airport, and if I start talking about Jesus, I would say that some, if not most, of my co-workers are thinking, ‘He’s weird. Why listen to him?’ That’s why sharing Christ can be so difficult at times because I’m afraid of the isolation, but I think that it’s common for believers to be afraid. That’s why Paul encourages us to be bold and never be ashamed, but it’s really hard.

Later that winter the Jews gathered around Jesus in the temple area and said,

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John 10:24-25 (NLT)

“How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus replied, “I have already told you and you don’t believe me”

That must have been so frustrating for Jesus, but God is so patient and so loving. Earlier on in John chapter 5 verses 24-27 Jesus tells the Jews,

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John 5:24-27 (NLT)

“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life. And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it’s here now, when the dead will hear my voice-the voice of the Son of God.

[23]

And those who listen will live. The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man.”

He goes on to say,

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John 5:28–29 (NLT)

28 Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, 29 and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.

Jesus Christ is the great shepherd and he's going to call our names and if you are one of his sheep you will hear his voice.

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Now, let's look at the prophesy in Zechariah 14:16-19.

Zechariah 14:16-19 (NLT)

"Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles."

These are events that haven't happened yet, by the way. The King being referred to in this passage is Jesus Christ.

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Zechariah 14:9 (NLT)

"And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord - his name alone will be worshiped."

During this reign of Christ, the Feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated by Israel and the whole world. All nations will be required to come and worship him and will be required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

God is building a Kingdom for the massive Ingathering of God's people like never before. He's preparing a place for us because he wants to Tabernacle with us. This event will be like no other event you could possibly imagine. No movie director or sporting event coordinator could possibly fathom the monumental proportion of that day. Our brains can't even begin to imagine it. And it's coming. It's going to happen and thinking about all of this made me wonder, how many people are living or have lived and are now buried in the earth? After all, all ashes return to the earth whether you're buried or cremated so every person's physical body that's ever lived is still on the earth somewhere.

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The Population Reference Bureau or PRB, by the way, estimates that 108 billion people have lived on the earth. This is based on the average size of the human population at different periods in history. If we have 7.3 billion people currently living on the earth that means that there are approximately over 100 billion people that have lived and are now buried somewhere in the earth. Now, even if they are off by 50 billion, that's still over 50 billion people. That's a lot of the earth's crust and soil that is made up of the ashes of people that have passed on. That is going to be a huge harvest of God's people.

Now, the Bible shows the sequence for the spiritual harvests in the New Testament.

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1 Corinthians 15:22-23 (NLT)

"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."

And in the book of Revelation, John testifies,

[29]

Revelation 20:12 (NLT)

“I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God’s throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.”

Personally, I think that God can see all of our stories happening at once as they unfold as part of his story because he’s looking down and seeing the big picture. We can only see very little and in a dim light because our earthly minds can only handle time in a linear world. So, it’s cool to think that all of these harvests, past, present and future, could be happening simultaneously in the heavenly realms because time isn’t confined on a linear plain with God. With God, time is multidimensional.

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In the book of John, chapter 7, verse 37, Jesus promises us Living Water. John writes,

John 7:37 (NLT)

“On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me!”

Jesus invites us to come to him. He invites us to surrender ourselves to him so that he can take care of us. The Living Water, Jesus Christ, makes us clean, makes us pure.

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The Feast of Tabernacles is a festival of joy and celebration—it’s about remembering what God has done and how he has provided for you. It is about God wanting to tabernacle with you—to be with you. **Our hearts are the Sukkah** where God lives and Tabernacles with us.

Your heart is the hut where Jesus lives and makes you clean. The Feast of Tabernacles is a time to think about the things that we take for granted and to give God the glory for how he has taken care of his sheep, past and present. It is a time to remember and rejoice about how he called you when you first turned to him and repented of your sin—broken and humble. It is a time to remember how he has carried you through difficult times in your life and blessed you with joy in other times of your life.

Remember that he is the one who allows seeds to germinate and food to grow above and below the ground. He is the one that brings the sun, the rain and the wind. Remember that Jesus Christ is the first of the first fruits and that we will be harvested from the earth later, and at just the right time. Remember that Jesus Christ is the Living Water that we need to make us clean. Remember that it is God who gives you every breath and allows your heart to beat and blood to flow through your veins.

Remember that it’s not important if you help plant the seed, water the seed, or harvest the seed. What’s important is that we are all God’s workers celebrating together as we Tabernacle with him. If you take the time to remember, it will cause you to be thankful for everything. And when you are thankful for everything you will be filled with his grace, and through it all God will give you peace. Let’s pray.



Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Sukkot - The Feast of Tabernacles
Week of February 25, 2018

Objective of this study: To understand the Feast of Tabernacles and its relevance for the follower of Jesus.

[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 117** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

[Note: Arrange the components of this study in a way that works for you depending on whether or not you have a meal]

[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 (60-90 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read John 10:1-30
 1. How does Jesus declare himself to be the fulfillment of the feasts?
3. **Sermon Quote:** “Forgetting God and moving away from God is what we naturally want to do. We think that we can celebrate and have a feast without God, but we only move ourselves farther away from his peace, his tabernacle.”

1. Read the following quote from Chris' sermon to guide your thoughts and conversation around the dinner table:

Sermon Quote: *“The Feast of Tabernacles is a festival of joy and celebration—it’s about remembering what God has done and how he has provided for you. It is about God wanting to tabernacle with you—to be with you. **Our hearts are the Sukkah** where God lives and Tabernacles with us.*

Your heart is the hut where Jesus lives and makes you clean. The Feast of Tabernacles is a time to think about the things that we take for granted and to give God the glory for how he has taken care of his sheep, past and present. It is a time to remember and rejoice about how he called you when you first turned to him and repented of your sin—broken and humble. It is a time to remember how he has carried you through difficult times in your life and blessed you with joy in other times of your life.

Remember that he is the one who allows seeds to germinate and food to grow above and below the ground. He is the one that brings the sun, the rain and the wind. Remember that Jesus Christ is the first of the first fruits and that we will be harvested from the earth later, and at just the right time. Remember that Jesus Christ is the Living Water that we need to make us clean.

Remember that it is God who gives you every breath and allows your heart to beat and blood to flow through your veins."

Remember that it's not important if you help plant the seed, water the seed, or harvest the seed. What's important is that we are all God's workers celebrating together as we Tabernacle with him. If you take the time to remember, it will cause you to be thankful."

4. The Feast of Tabernacles was a way God provided for the Israelites to learn and practice being thankful. It's very important, likewise, for us to purposefully remember God's provision and thank him. Take the remainder of the time to look back at your story where you have seen God's provision and share ways you are thankful.

Prayer

1. Spend some time in prayer. Start by worshipping God for who he is and what he has done. Focus on being grateful. Pray about the things you discussed in the study.
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
 - A. Praise God that he met all our needs financially last year.
 - B. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
 - C. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
 - D. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
 - E. **Our missionary of the month:** Aaron and Julie Gole - Camp Homewood
 - F. **Our missionary of the week:** Duane and Dawn Bakken in Asia Pacific
 - G. **Local CR church:** Discovery Community Church: Pastor Matt and Deanna DelBlanc