

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2021
SERMON: GOOD GOD VS. BAD GOD?
TEXT: JOSHUA 6:20-27

A favorite term of today's society is "cancel culture." A quick search on the internet finds a Wikipedia article that begins with this definition:

***Cancel culture or call-out culture** is a modern form of ostracism in which someone is thrust out of social or professional circles – whether it be online, on social media, or in person. Those subject to this ostracism are said to have been "cancelled". The expression "cancel culture" has mostly negative connotations and is used in debates on free speech and censorship.*

It seems today that anything that is deemed "offensive" runs the risk of **being cancelled. Now this is nothing new. A quick study of history shows** us that the term "cancel culture" might not have been used but it has been around. One example of this is the list you can easily find of books that, at some point in time, were burned and if they weren't burned, they were banned. Many classics like **The Great Gatsby, Huckleberry Finn, and To Kill a Mockingbird** have been considered offensive or controversial. Over the last several years classics by Laura Ingalls Wilder and even beloved Dr. Seuss have come under criticism, scrutiny, and, yes, even cancellation because of content.

Celebrities run the risk of being cancelled for their opinions and even historic actions. Several very popular actors recently lost valued roles and monetary perks for their opinion (right or wrong) being on the wrong side of the recent American election, regardless of the fact that their opinions really did no damage to any company or sponsor. It is a habit of actors, politicians, and celebrities to be cancelled when actions and opinions are unearthed through social media hunts reveal "offensive" actions and opinions from as much as a decade or more ago. There doesn't seem to be any grace or mercy for individuals who regret their actions but have proven to have grown and matured since the offending actions.

There is a war on history. In both our own country and our neighbor's country, those who fall on the wrong side of history or participated in

actions that are “now” deemed wrong are paying by having their names diminished and even erased from the annals of history. Close to home, our first Canadian prime minister, Sir John A. MacDonal d is being cancelled. Many Fathers of Confederation and other significant Canadian figures are being cancelled. In the United States, a group of educators from San Francisco are suggesting that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and even Abraham Lincoln should be erased from the history curriculum. Recent detestable and horrific historic actions even called into question our Canadian pride and heritage with many cancelling Canada Day.

We must come to an understanding of how history, even horrific history, should be handled. Is it to be remembered and used to help us not repeat it or do we simply get rid of it as we hoist our “21st century” opinions onto historic events and individuals regardless of context and culture? It is a volatile, messy, emotional puzzle to try to solve.

Christians have their own messiness that must be dealt with. Today we tackle such an issue as we continue through Joshua. How do we deal with the troubling passages that seem to make God a heartless murderer who has, at times, seemed to command genocide? If you have ever dealt much with the world’s seeming hatred of the Bible based on historic actions and content, you might have found yourself unable to answer our critics, and even found yourself with new doubts about God and the Christian faith. We going to briefly tackle this issue today.

Let’s begin by reading a possibly troubling passage found in Joshua 6:20-27:

²⁰ When the people heard the sound of the rams’ horns, they shouted as loud as they could. Suddenly, the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the Israelites charged straight into the town and captured it. ²¹ They completely destroyed everything in it with their swords—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys.

²² Meanwhile, Joshua said to the two spies, “Keep your promise. Go to the prostitute’s house and bring her out, along with all her family.”

²³ The men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and all the other relatives who were with her. They moved her whole family to a safe place near the camp of Israel.

²⁴ Then the Israelites burned the town and everything in it. Only the things made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron were kept for the treasury of the LORD's house. ²⁵ So Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute and her relatives who were with her in the house, because she had hidden the spies Joshua sent to Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day.

²⁶ At that time Joshua invoked this curse:

**"May the curse of the LORD fall on anyone
who tries to rebuild the town of Jericho.**

**At the cost of his firstborn son,
he will lay its foundation.**

**At the cost of his youngest son,
he will set up its gates."**

²⁷ So the LORD was with Joshua, and his reputation spread throughout the land.

THE PROBLEM

The Battle of Jericho – a wild, crazy, amazing story that children and adults have been enjoying and learning about for centuries. The problem is that the story doesn't stop with the walls tumbling down! There is a postlude to the famous battle that is often overlooked – and believe me, as a pastor it is tempting to just skip the last 7 verses of chapter six and move on to more exciting stories.

What is the problem? The problem for so many over the year, a problem that has even been the excuse for people to quit Christianity and certainly denounce the Bible and our beliefs, is the reality of what God told Joshua to do when the walls came down.

The Children of Israel were to go into Jericho and kill all the “men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys” (v. 21). Often the objection becomes, “How can a loving God call for the death of so many people?” Jericho was not the first and it was not the last case of this!

For the average church goer – we have no idea what to do with these passages, and if we are honest, we would prefer to ignore them! Some take a hard line against God. Many will somehow try to separate the Old Testament from the New Testament and give you the idea that the Old Testament is somehow inferior to the New – after all – the New Testament contains Jesus – and deserves more of our attention. We tend to forget that when we read 2 Timothy 3:16:

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

we forget that Paul was instructing Timothy on the value and necessity of the scripture they possessed, which was our Old Testament! Paul died somewhere around 64-68 AD, being put to death by Emperor Nero, and the New Testament, as a group of letters and books, won't begin to be compiled for probably another 60+ years and won't be officially recognized as “cannon” until around 397 AD – 330 years after Paul's death.

Jesus, the Apostles, early church fathers, and the early church all held to the importance and authority of the Old Testament! So, what do we do with it in 2021? How can the population of Jericho be slaughtered, and a good God act this way? Why talk about this at all? Because we must honestly and openly deal with our Christian history. Because real, sensitive, intelligently thought-through questions are raised by non-believer and believer alike! A second reason is that, if we take the Bible seriously, not choosing to do the work to understand these passages, we will run the risk of losing deep theological and spiritual insight as we tackle the tough questions on the road to understanding the character and nature of God.

In his commentary on Joshua, John A. Huffman, Jr gives us four observations to consider today.

OBSERVATION 1 – GOD IS GOD!

When you talk to some Christians, you might easily get the idea that the God of the Old Testament is somehow fundamentally different than the God of the New Testament. This is false! God is God!

Have you ever noticed that the Bible does not sugar-coat our greatest heroes and examples? If anything, the Bible is blatantly honest! Noah got drunk, Abraham lied, Moses murdered, David was an murderous adulterer, Thomas was a doubter, Paul was a persecutor, Peter consistently put his foot in his mouth! The list goes on about the character flaws of the Biblical characters. God could have crafted a book that put everyone in a perfect light – most of all Himself! But He didn't. The Old Testament is the foundation of the New Testament church and to be a Christian means that you are placed, as scholar Peter Craigie states, in a ***"take-it-or-leave-it"*** state. To question the Old Testament is to question scripture in its entirety. As Huffman puts it, *"to dismiss the Old Testament would be to dismiss a part of God and remove from Him a certain quality that actually enhances His holiness, His majesty, His sovereignty, and His grace."*

OBSERVATION 2 – GOD CHOSE TO BE ACTIVE IN HISTORY AND IN OUR LIVES!

It is not outlandish to admit that most of our history, ancient and modern, is devoted to war. Historians tell us that only 268 scattered years out of 3400 years that there has been peace or 8%. Some scholars argue that there has never been a true time of peace. The stats for 2020/2021 tell us that there are 4 countries considered to be "at war" and at least 18 countries that have some type of civil or terrorist insurgencies going on. War is a sinful, human activity, and it shows our inhumanity.

All these discouraging and depressing facts have to give way to the most amazing and powerful discovery you will ever make. God is a God who involves Himself in our human wars – as sinful as they are. Why? Because He is a God who involves Himself in the lives of His creation, as sinful as we are!

A Holy God could have tossed His creation aside and allow us to fend for ourselves. He could have abandoned us and our rebellion towards Him and started fresh and new with a different creation...but He didn't! Instead, He chose to enter into a conversation with the bearers of His image who are fallen and sinful and rebellious and He handcrafted promises and covenants that would redeem sinful humanity and rescue us from the grips of death and hell – that we deserved. God's participation in history has not only told us more about His character, but we learn about His will and activity! His offer of salvation. He enters our lives, as sinful as we are, and uses us to fulfill his redemption plans!

God does not like war! Humans created wars. Yet God has and will use war to bring about His will. It is another Romans 8:28 application:

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Before you question or criticize God, allow this mind-blowing fact to sink in...***God loves us so much that He decided to be active in our lives "as we are" rather than "as He would like us to be!"*** The Bible is the story of ordinary people who are good and bad. God recognizes our sinfulness and still enters into agreements with us that He always keeps, and we always break. The God of the Old and New Testament is the same God. The only difference is that in the New Testament He actually fulfills what He promises in the Old and becomes human and dies on the cross in the ultimate act of love.

OBSERVATION 3 – GOD IS A JUDGE WHO IS CONSISTENT!

God hates sin and loves us! But His love for us does not allow Him to compromise His holiness. It is hard for us to understand, but when God tells Joshua to destroy everyone in Jericho, it is loving protection that God is enacting. God, in His sovereign knowledge, is protecting His children from any thing or anyone who would threaten to pollute the faith and practices of Israel. The people have proven over and over that they were unable to stay faithful to God's commands. Foreign beliefs and practices consistently dragged God's people into sin and disobedience. God continually must rescue the people from their own sinfulness.

God's actions aren't whimsical gut-feelings that He imposes. He isn't an immoral God who one moment decides to wipe out innocent people. Hundreds of years before Joshua, in Genesis 15, God promises Abraham the land. God also informs Abraham that it going to take 4 generations to accomplish this because:

"...for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction." (v.16).

God didn't destroy and innocent, unsuspecting Jericho. God punished an evil society that had 400 years to repent of their evil and didn't, and wouldn't. This isn't the only example of God's judgement on an evil society. We see it in the fates of Babe (Gen. 11:4), Sodom (Gen. 19:4-29), Nineveh (Nah. 3:1), Tyre (Ezekiel 26:17-19), Babylon (Jer. 50:23), and even Rome (Rev. 18:10).

We tend to forget that God does judge, and He does it consistently. He doesn't just spank the evil, foreign pagans, He punishes His own children when they need it.

If something was going to contaminate the peoples worship and obedience of God and lead them into compromise (which was always inevitable), God

wanted it completely and totally destroyed. Sin is contagious and cannot go unpunished.

OBSERVATION 4 – GOD IS A GOD OF GRACE!

The Battle of Jericho is far more than a story of retribution and punishment. The Battle of Jericho is an example of God's grace. A stubborn people have gotten their hearts right with their God. They have been delivered into the land of promise and they have had a mighty example that God will move them forward and will act powerfully on their behalf.

We now must remember the final player in the story – a prostitute named Rahab. A person who, on the surface, should have perished with all the others. Yet when we understand her story, we come face to face with someone who embodies the promise of Jeremiah 29:13:

¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

The Battle of Jericho is the story of a sensitive, caring God who initiates His infinite grace. We see promised destruction balanced by promised salvation. Think about this for a moment? Why did God have Joshua send two spies to Jericho? It was God's strategy from the start – wouldn't an all-knowing God have all the information he needed without sending in spies? Or was it that God knew that in Jericho was a sinful woman who hungered for God, for righteousness, for a new life. Jesus makes the same play hundreds of years later. Jesus decided to travel through Samaria instead of the usual Jewish custom of traveling around to avoid the Samaritans. Why did Jesus do this? Because he knew he would stop for a drink and encounter a sinful woman in need of the "water of life."

FOR US TODAY

God is still a consistent judge who shows boundless grace and mercy – and that should excite us to the very core of our being! God is still not respecter of persons. He judges sin severely and extends grace to all who trust Him. He isn't a God of violence but rather He desires peace. The

peace He desires is specifically that embodied in the Hebrew word "shalom." Shalom is not the absence of conflict; it is the desire for an individual to have everything that is perfect. It is a blessing that desires wholeness.

Because God is active in our lives, at times He must be active in the chaos that we create with our sin and disobedience, or, sadly, the chaos that envelopes us caused by someone else's sin and disobedience. God is the same God that choose to work in us when we are at our weakest. He works in our sickness, our trials, our confusion, and even in our violence.

The world would cancel God based on the story of Jericho and its destruction. But the world would also ignore those who find salvation through the act of God's judgment and grace.

As we seek to understand God's word and draw closer to Him daily, may we have the faith to trust in His sovereignty, even when we can make no sense of it. May we not be confused by the world's interpretation, but rather rest in the shalom of God.

May we remember what Paul taught us in Romans 5:6-10:

⁶We were weak and could not help ourselves. Then Christ came at the right time and gave His life for all sinners. ⁷No one is willing to die for another person, but for a good man someone might be willing to die. ⁸But God showed His love to us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Now that we have been saved from the punishment of sin by the blood of Christ, He will save us from God's anger also. ¹⁰We hated God. But we were saved from the punishment of sin by the death of Christ. He has brought us back to God and we will be saved by His life.

Let's pray...