

Series Title: **Simple Prayers that Strengthen the Soul**

Message Title: **'Lord, Use Me'**

Scripture Source: **Joshua 2:1-23; Hebrews 11:31**

Date: Sunday, August 13, 2017

Teacher: John Garner

Unlikely...yet, wow!

There have been moments in watching America's Got Talent or The Voice that first impressions of a person weren't favorable. Talk about judging a book by its cover, the singer Jordan Smith or from a number of years ago, Susan Boyle. Unlikely to move people deeply, but did they ever. Our culture and human nature places such emphasis on outward appearance that we think it unlikely that something powerful and stirring can come from certain people. At times we are chastened for our readiness to write off someone. People that don't fit the mold we have created...that don't look a certain way, or come from a certain place or have certain credentials. We don't expect much from them. And then when we listen or interact we are humbled by who they are and what they do contribute.

Unlikely Stops: Joshua 2

A short history lesson...the people of God are beginning to possess the Promised Land. Yet, there are enemies to conquer in the process. See Joshua 1:10-15. Joshua sends out two spies to check things out, to get 'the lay of the land.' To see what they are up against. Joshua 2:1 Jericho is a well fortified city, not an easy target, yet God has promised he will enable his people to overcome the obstacles that must be faced. Including profoundly immoral practices in the name of their religion.

Where the two men lodge raises eyebrows. Joshua 2:1 *"they...entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab."* What were these men thinking? Didn't they know who... or what she was? Jewish tradition has it that Rahab was stunningly beautiful. Maybe a weak moment drew these men through her front door. Who knows, but God uses unlikely people to serve his purposes.

A knock on the front door. Joshua 2:2-3. The king of Jericho has learned that the two spies have ended up on her doorstep. She has a choice to make, turn them in or protect them. She opts for protection. Joshua 2:4-7. A courageous move on her behalf. But why?

An Unlikely Faith: Joshua 2:8-11

Rahab tells of her chosen faith in the God of the Israelites. She has heard stories that have resulted in faith in God. She wants to experience deliverance from Jewish judgement that is certainly just around the corner. That story is chronicled in Joshua 5:13-6. Back to Rahab's story of coming to faith in God. She is desperate for deliverance and wants to be assured of deliverance. Joshua 2:12-21. An agreement is struck between the spies and Rahab and God in an unexpected way uses an unlikely person to further his purposes in the world.

Unlikely Conduits: Lessons learned from Rahab's Story

God has a history of working powerfully through unlikely people to affect change in culture, to alleviate suffering, to address issues of injustice and to reveal his love, mercy and compassion to all sorts of people. In the Bible, unlikely heroes and champions of faith, mercy and love abound. Abraham, aged yet ready to take God at his word, Moses, hampered in his mind by a speech impediment and a fearful disposition, Gideon, racked with low self-esteem, David, fiercely devoted to God and at times incredibly self-indulgent and deceptive. In the New Testament, Mary, a teenager who would become the earthly mother of Jesus. Yet, all of these people were willing to be used of God. In effect, their ongoing and genuine simple prayer was, 'Lord, use me.' And God did.

In extra biblical history God has used imperfect yet willing-to-be-used people to further his agenda of love, mercy, compassion, justice and spiritual salvation through faith in Jesus. Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Bono and the list goes on and on.

What can we learn from this unusual story of Rahab? God can work through the most unlikely of people to enrich the lives of others, if only we are ready and willing to say, 'Lord, use me.'

Think of Rahab, included in the lineage of Jesus, Matthew 1:5. She wasn't photoshopped (edited) out of the family picture! Consider Hebrews 11:31: in the illustrious listing of men and women of faith, powerfully used of God as 'conduits' of spiritual hope and practical help for others, Rahab is named. "*By faith the prostitute Rahab...*" James 2:25

We learn that God looks beyond the 'cover of the book' and its title or label and sees what is and what can be by his grace, mercy and power through responsiveness to Jesus. This is huge, because so many of us live haunted and hampered by labels...self imposed or pinned on us by others. Labels that speak of our struggles, or we are defined by a choice that created unwanted consequences.

Are we to be written off or merely tolerated? Can God work powerfully in us and through us to enrich others even though imperfection, flaws, and poor choices are part of our story? Is that the whole story?

- For the man or woman grappling with an addiction to pornography
- For a young person struggling to understand who they are at a gender level
- For the person wondering why same sex attraction is so strong and unrelenting
- For the middle aged person who has lost their marriage and family through neglect
- For the woman haunted by the memory of an abortion obtained years ago
- For the person battling to handle unruly emotions and thoughts
- For the person dealing with the effects of aging

For these struggles and experiences and countless others, can we know of God's grace, power and forgiveness? Can our story, the whole of it, be used by a loving and wise God to encourage others to consider the message of Jesus? To find hope and mercy along the way? Yes, there is hope through the grace of God. Do not let 'labels' and defining moments/choices have the final word or comprise your whole story. There is more to you than a label or event. You are more than a 'what'... you are a 'who'. There is you...a life, a person made in the image of God. Waiting to experience more fully the truth of Ephesians 2:10.

This day, as freely and fully as you can, speak this simple prayer to God...'Lord, use me...including my struggles and experiences.'