

“THE PERIL OF PRAYERLESSNESS”

Joshua 9

Mililani Community Church

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Remember as we study the book of Joshua that this book contains a lot more than just a historical record of Israel’s conquest and occupation of the land of Canaan. It is included in the Word of God because in this book the Lord is teaching us principles for living the Christian life.

God calls us His “witnesses” but he also calls us “soldiers” of Jesus Christ. If we are going to be good soldiers we need to go to war college and learn the principles of spiritual warfare. Studying Joshua is like going to a spiritual war college. In this book God describes not only Israel’s victories but also their defeats—so that we can learn the secrets of success in the Christian life and also the causes of failure in the Christian life.

As we observe the nature of Joshua’s failure in this chapter we are being warned about one of the causes of failure in our own lives as Christians. God had told the children of Israel to totally destroy all the nations living in the land of Canaan. However, they could make peace with those who lived far away. The Gibeonites knew about this and so they hoped to save themselves by deceiving Joshua into thinking they were from very far away.

Joshua believed them and made a treaty of peace with them and ratified it with an oath. The problem was that Joshua did all this without inquiring of the Lord. *Verse 14 is the key verse.* Literally it means, he did not seek the mouth of the Lord. In other words he didn’t seek a word from God on the matter. He went ahead and made this decision without really praying about it. Neglecting to pray always leads to trouble.

Within three days Joshua found out they were actually people who lived just a few miles from Jericho and Ai, people that God had marked out for total destruction. Because of their failure to seek the Lord on the matter, they had made a big mistake.

This is a classic illustration of how gullible we are and how easily Satan can deceive us, and how important it is to bring everything to the Lord in prayer. But as we read to the end of the chapter, we will see how God who can overrule our mistakes for His glory even though we still have to live with the consequences of our mistakes.

Outline (adapted from No Time for Neutrality, Donald Campbell, chapter 7)

The Deception Of The Gibeonites (3-13)

The Discovery Of The Deception (14-16)

The Decision Of Joshua And The Leaders (17-27)

(Please read the entire chapter of Joshua 9 before reading this sermon)

We learn in verses 1-2 that the people of Canaan had heard about Israel's victories over Jericho and Ai and they had heard about the events at Mt. Ebal and Gerizim where the Israelites had acknowledged the rights and authority of God over their lives and had proclaimed that the Law of God would be the Law of the land. This provoked a two-fold response from the Canaanites.

First the kings of these nations came together to make war against Joshua and Israel. They did not intend to surrender. Even after they learned of the miraculous crossing of Jordan and the fall of Jericho and Ai, they refused to capitulate.

It happens that way in our lives as well. Satan never accepts defeat and never quits the field. If you are taking ground for the Lord, if your life is counting for Him, then Satan will figure out a way to oppose you.

The second response of Israel's enemies is seen in verses 3-4. The Gibeonites were convinced that they could never defeat Israel in war. So instead of military force, they decided to use deceit against Israel. The strategy of Gibeon against Israel is an illustration of how Satan uses different strategies to attempt to defeat us. Satan is described in the Bible both as a roaring lion and as a subtle serpent. As the lion, he uses force and tries to terrorize us. As the serpent, he employs cunning and tries to secretly corrupt us. In moving the Gibeonites to deceive Israel we see Satan's craftiness.

Let's look at their strategy in vv. 3-13...

DECEPTION OF THE GIBEONITES (vv. 3-13)

READ vv. 3-13...

Why did they use this masquerade? As I said, somehow they had learned of the commands of God in Deuteronomy 7:1-2. But there was another provision in Deuteronomy 20:10-15. While they could not make a treaty with any of the nations of Canaan, they could make a treaty with a nation that was far off. READ v. 10, 15-17. Somehow they had learned of this provision. So they came with their old clothes and moldy bread and their patched sandals. As someone has said, "It was an Oscar-winning performance," as someone has said, because they completely deceived Joshua and the leaders of Israel. Adlai Stevenson once said, "*A lie is an abomination unto the Lord, but a very present help in trouble.*" But deception will not work permanently. It didn't work for the Gibeonites. And it won't work for anyone who is trying to live a life pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10).

Verses 14-16...from the deception TO the discovery...

THE DISCOVERY OF THE DECEPTION (vv. 14-16)

READ v. 14. Key verse of the chapter. They used their own judgement. After all, Joshua and the leaders were intelligent men. Weren't they able to evaluate the evidence? They saw the torn garments, the worn out wineskins, the worn out sandals, and the moldy bread. They looked at this evidence and they relied on their own judgement, and they made a decision—and they were deceived!

What does this say? Obviously it says that we need to pray before we make decisions. Even when the decision looks obvious? Yes, even when it looks obvious. Even when you have evidence that this is the way to go? Yes, even when you have evidence, because that evidence may turn out to be “some of the Devil’s moldy bread” that he is using to deceive you and to mislead you.

So pray! ***“In everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God”*** (Phil. 4:6-7). These men ***“did not inquire of the LORD.”***

Alan Redpath wrote: “Never, never, never trust your own judgement in anything. When common sense says that a course is right, lift your heart to God, for the path of faith and the path of blessing may be in a direction completely opposite to that which you call common sense. When voices tell you that action is urgent, that something must be done immediately, refer everything to the tribunal of heaven. Then if you are still in doubt, dare to stand still. If you are called on to act and you have not time to pray, don’t act. If you are called on to move in a certain direction and cannot wait until you have peace with God about it, don’t move. Be strong enough and brave enough to dare to stand and wait on God, for none of them that wait on Him shall ever be ashamed. That is the only way to outmatch the devil” (Redpath, Victorious Christian Living, 142).

Again, Alan Redpath wrote: “It seems to take us a long time to learn the lesson that neglect of prayer always leads to trouble, and destroys the spirit of discernment. Neglect of prayer always suggests pride in our own judgment, which is fatal” (Redpath, 142).

Proverbs 3:5-6: “...***In ALL thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.***”

READ vv. 14-15.

But in verse 16 it says...: “Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them...”

Now what decision can be made? Well, in vv. 17-27 we see the decision...

THE DECISION OF JOSHUA AND THE LEADERS (vv. 17-27)

READ vv. 17-20.

Verse 18 says the people complained against their leaders. They had a right to do that, because the leaders had made a big mistake. *But what was the response of Joshua and ALL the leaders of Israel?* *READ vv. 19-20.* A covenant oath was made in the name of the LORD God of Israel. Instead of looking for loopholes, they stood against the desires of the people and said, “We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now.” They were men of integrity who stood by their word. They did not want to bring disgrace on God and His people by breaking a sacred treaty. They realized they would have to live with this decision.

400 years later in the reign of King Saul, he violated this covenant by killing some Gibeonites. God sided with the Gibeonites and brought judgement upon Israel. There was a three year famine in Israel “because Saul put the Gibeonites to death.” (II Samuel 21:1-6). It was removed only after the house of Saul was judged.

This story of Gibeon and Israel shows us the great problem with a failure to consult the LORD in everything. We have to live with the consequences of our wrong actions.

BUT can't sin or wrong action be forgiven? YES of course it can. But the consequences of that action must often be lived with indefinitely.

We could think of a number of examples, but the obvious example here is marriage. Malachi chapter 2 tells us that marriage is a sacred covenant made between two people before God. Sometimes Christians marry someone who is not God's choice for them. Usually the mistake involves marrying a non-Christian. Sometimes the same thing can happen in the lives of two believers. What can we do in a situation like that?

The world's answer is: "Get a divorce. Do what's best for yourself. Think about your future."

But God's Word speaks very clearly to this issue. Paul wrote about it in I Corinthians 7:10,11:

"...A wife must not separate from her husband...And a husband must not divorce his wife."

And above all there must be no remarriage. The Lord Jesus said, ***"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery"*** (Mark 10:11,12).

So disobedience to God is not a solution to the bad consequences of an earlier disobedience. But the wonderful thing is that obedience often IS a solution. At least it provides conditions in which God frequently does unexpected things. That was the case with the Gibeonites. God turned the curse into a blessing in their lives. They had deceived Israel by pretending to come from a far land when they were actually close neighbors. Their lives were saved, but Joshua made them slaves. We read in verse 21: ***"Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community..."***

But then let your eyes run down to verse 27 where we find the same phrase, but with a significant addition: ***"That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose..."***

That is a tremendous statement! The Gibeonites were made servants to the Jews, but the place of their service was specifically said to be "at the altar of the Lord." In other words, their work would be carried out in the tabernacle and the temple, a place where they would be exposed to the worship of the one true God.

The curse that was placed upon them became a blessing. Their place of service eventually influenced them to abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel. Their work eventually gave them a place of honor in Israel. King David put the tabernacle at Gibeon. At least one of David's military advisors, his mighty men, was a Gibeonite. Ezra in his writings after the captivity tells us that they were totally committed to the Lord and his house. They helped in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah.

CONCLUSION

We may make our mistakes, lose our battles. We all do. But God is able to overcome our sins and our mistakes, even to cause the curse to be turned into a blessing. If you have made a mistake, lost a battle, and find yourself in a difficult situation—you can't make that an excuse for breaking your word. God may use the mistakes you have made to strengthen your prayer life and deepen your devotion to Christ.

Recently I received a letter from a dear brother in Christ whom I had the privilege of leading to Christ a number of years ago in the Hawaii State Prison. He was one of the inmates transferred to the mainland; and he is in a prison in Tennessee right now. When I met him he was one of the “bulls” of the prison—a tough guy who was feared by many of the other inmates. He came to prison as an angry man. But God made his prison experience a blessing, because it was there he came to faith in Jesus Christ. I saw God make something beautiful out of his life. In this letter he says, *“Dear Brother Rick: I am so thankful that you taught me to build my life on the solid foundation of God’s Word. I thank God for his truth in the Bible. Thank you and Diane for praying for me. Your prayers are working. God is still changing my life and using my life for His glory.”* Even though he has been in prison for many years for the crimes he committed, he is thankful for the life-transforming power of God’s Word in His life. He is rejoicing in the Lord, even though he is still facing the consequences of past mistakes and failures and may spend the rest of his life behind bars.

Alan Redpath wrote: *“The wretched man who once was bound by sin discovers that the very sin which bound him is now the blessing which, more than anything else, brings him to consecrated service to his Savior.”* Praise God that he does overrule our mistakes and our sins, even to cause the curse itself to be turned into a blessing and to make something beautiful out of something destructive.

Bill and Gloria Gather wrote a song entitled: “Something Beautiful.” *“Something beautiful, something good—All my confusion he understood; All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife; But he made something beautiful of my life.”*

There are some parallels between the Gibeonites and us. They were liars, deceivers. They were under judgment and exposed to the wrath of God. We have been also. We heard of the true God as they did. At the beginning we did not know very much about him. Yet God used that small beginning to draw us into his family where we learned more. We too believed and were saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you have not yet become part of God’s family, let what you know of the true God draw you. You only need to know that He is the true God and that he has provided the way for you to be saved through the death of Jesus on the cross. Come to him today!