

Joshua 9

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 May 2016

Preacher: David Meredith

[0 : 0 0] Can we open our Bibles, please, in the Joshua passage, Joshua 9, looking tonight at the Gibeonite deception? There's a plan by the kings of the West to attack the people of God. In verse 3, we read, however, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse. They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins cracked and mended. The men put worn and packed sandals on their feet and wore old clothes while the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him, and the men of Israel, we have come from a distant country, make a treaty with us.

American Christian magazines are incredibly depressing. They are incredibly depressing, not because of what is written, but have you noticed the photos of everybody on them?

Everybody is so slim, and their teeth are so white, and they are really, really straight. And the depressing thing is that's not what life is like. Life is a little bit more complex than that, and the perfect photo opportunity and the perfect, sometimes airbrushed photo, is not the reality of our lives. Thank God for the Bible, because the Bible never flatters its heroes. The Bible never gives us perfect people, but whenever we read in the Bible, we see there an honesty about people in every single situation. The Bible is absolutely full of blunt, honest realism, because in the Bible, as in life, things are rarely straightforward, and indeed people are rarely as they are seen. And so this evening, we all look incredibly nice and biddable, and you all look so together, but we all know that most of us are on the verge maybe of falling apart at the seams, or if not falling apart, pushing the seams out a little bit. Alan Redpath, that sort of author of an older generation, said, I find it tremendously comforting that the Bible never flatters its heroes. It tells the truth about them, no matter how unpleasant that may be. Remember the New Testament church? They gathered together there after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus

Christ. And we have these words, and we have these words that when they spoke about the resurrection, some doubted. And so there's the honesty there that even to say amongst that crowd of people that there were some doubters. Those of you who are students of history will remember Stalin, of course, the Russian leader, and Stalin had these big political rallies, and you had to clap. And the person who stopped clapping ended up in the gulag for the rest of their lives. And so the applause to Stalin's speech is going on hours and hours and hours, because folk were terrified to be the first guy or girl to stop clapping. God's not like that. God does not demand that outward respect. God wants to see the reality. And so we have in the Bible not the perfectly honed Greek gods with perfect bodies and disciplined minds. Is that the classic evangelical image? Sorted people with sorted minds. Well, let's come to this passage, because the Gibeonites are certainly not sorted people with sorted minds. In fact, they came into the kingdom in a fairly unorthodox manner. The Ephesians passage says that those who were far off were brought near. In the Gibeonites, we find there men and women who were far off, and yet they were brought near into the very kingdom of God through a very unorthodox manner. Now, I imagine that many folk here have never heard the story of the Gibeonite deception before, and if you've read it in the Bible, you maybe just passed by it. Let me give a survey of where we are and what's happening here. The book of Joshua, of course, is the book which is fulfilling the vision of Joshua and Caleb. We saw the promised land, and remember, the children of Israel were scared to enter in.

But then we find that Joshua and Caleb lead the people in, and at this point, Joshua is leading the people in to subdue and take over the promised land, and it's a very tricky situation here. We find that there are some victories, there are some defeats, and so the first half of the book is talking about, you know, capturing Jericho, capturing the city of Ai. We all know the story. Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down, because remember, the people of God went in over the Jordan River, and we all know the old story, crossed over the Jordan, what did I say, and what they saw were two really big cities, and, you know, Joshua fought the battle of Jericho. It's a great song. The only problem was there wasn't a battle, was there? Joshua didn't fight it. Apart from that, it's a great title for a song. God took the walls down. There was no battle. It was a rout. And so they invaded the land. All the enemies of the people of God were absolutely routed. But then we come to this story here. It was a military campaign to occupy Canaan. Now, Canaan was not a single unitary land.

[6 : 36] There were, I am told, 31 kings to be defeated in a seven-year program. So the book of Joshua is about, you know, subduing the land. They had to defeat 31 kings, and they had seven years to do it. And it was a blend of warfare and worship. So they were an unstoppable war machine. The Israelite army were feared, they were relentless, they were on a run, destroying everything to the right of them and to the left of them, just like rangers last season. An unstoppable force, smashing all their enemies, undefeated, and apparently invincible. And so we find here in chapter 9, Israel's unstoppable war machine, Jericho and Ai, had been routed. So verse 1 and verse 2, the kings to the west said, there may be trouble ahead.

They were about to be invaded, and they thought, we will have to make war against Joshua and Israel. And so this disparate group of kings in the west, they got together in a coalition to attempt to attempt to stop what I've said was the apparently unstoppable war machine of the people of God who were relentless and destroying and devouring everything in path. Now, what we have here is a very interesting situation, don't we? Verse 1 and 2, the kings of the west couldn't stand one another. They were foes, they were rivals, and yet they get together against the people of God.

Don't we find that so often that enemies get together when the people of God are the enemy? You see that in the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The religious authorities, the high priest, the high priest, the Sanhedrin, got together with the political authorities, the Romans, Pilate, and the power brokers of that day, Herod, they got together against the Lord.

There is an unholy alliance here, and isn't it interesting that the power of the world is futile against the people of God? Psalm 2, for example. This is an outworking of the philosophy of Psalm 2, where it says, kings of the earth conspired against the Lord and against His anointing, saying, thus we will pull Him down. Remember what it says, he who sits in the heaven shall laugh.

The Lord shall scorn them all. Many of his views spiritual battle and spiritual warfare, kind of like Star Wars. There's a force of good and evil, and it's equal and opposite. And may the force be with you, and whoever the force is with will win. And so it's a kind of finely balanced universal battle between the power of good and the power of evil. No. No. No. It is a rout.

[10 : 12] Jehovah, king of kings and lord of lords, is installed. He is king. His forces outnumber the forces of the opposition. And so the powers of the evil one are significant, but ultimately not even near dominant, as again we see in the later half of this passage. And so the kings of the west are conspired in coalition against the people of God. But then the Gibeonites, the people who were from Gibeon, said, it's not going to work here. Because if we join in coalition with the kings of the west, we are going to get killed. They knew enough to know that if they met the people of Israel, they were actually meeting God. And the Gibeonites knew enough to know that they could never, ever in a million years defeat the God of the armies of Joshua. And they knew they were pagans.

They knew that they could never thwart the purposes of God. Now, I've got to tell you something here, which is really, really important. Gibeon was very, very near the people of God. It was very, very near them. And so there they were, the kings of the west. They conspired against the people of God, and they had established a base. Now, God had said, you're not to make a treaty with anyone who lives near you. Now, Gibeonite was only eight miles away. It was kind of like, like Cantor. It wasn't all that far away. So imagine Cantor is the land of the Gibeonites. It's not. But imagine it is. So they're quite near. And so the folk in Aberdeen have not to make a treaty with the folk in Cantor, because it is bad to make a treaty with folk who are near. It upsets everything. You were allowed to make a treaty with folk who were far away. So you could make a treaty with people in Wick, far away. And folk in Cantor speak very differently to folk from Wick, and it is easy to, you know, say who's who. And so what happened is that the Gibeonites, who only lived seven miles away, knew this. So they pretended that they'd come from a long way away. So that's why they went, they resorted to a ruse. They had worn out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. They went into their garage. They had old trainers. They had old clothes to look as if they'd come a long, long way, to look as if they'd walked all the way from Wick, and they only looked all the way from

Cantor. And so remember Gibeon, it was visible from Jerusalem. You could see it on a good day. And so that's what the ruse was. It was an Oscar-winning performance. Now there's an element of a sense of humor here. You know, they went into the things you keep in the garage, these old trainers that you use for doing the grass, the old pair of jeans. You put them on, and you look as if you've come a long way. Now if you're into biblical humor, the opposite was done in Genesis 34.

You can do this later on at night. In Genesis 34, the Israelites had conned the Gibeonites, and it's actually quite a hilarious passage. Genesis 34. I'll leave that treat to you later on, and you'll see how it's funny when you read it later, especially the men will appreciate it.

And so we find here that they were conned. Have you ever been conned? You know, have you ever been the subject to a real con? I don't mean some dear lady from West Africa who wants to deposit 50 million dollars in your bank to look after it because her husband has died and stuff like that, or the guy from Microsoft who phones you up and tells you that you've got a problem with your computer. That's a fairly obvious con, but most of us have been conned in some way by really sophisticated con people. This wasn't a very sophisticated con, but that's another matter.

[15 : 15] They didn't consult from the Lord, and a peace treaty was made. So that's the story. I think it's an interesting story. I think it's got an element of humor. How all these Gibeonites from a long way basically conned themselves, and by their wit, they escaped an inevitable defeat from the armies of Joshua and the Lord. So the passage is known as the Gibeonite deception. Can I pull out, I think, four different applications from that incident for us this evening? What are these four applications?

They are all one-word applications. Remember my imaginary PowerPoint is up there, and all these things are flashing on the screen. And so the very first line of the screen will say discernment. It's the first word, discernment. Discernment is the ability to know what's good and what's bad. Discernment can be taught, or it can be caught. Usually we get discernment from a mixture of the two. And so we find here there's a very sad verse here, verse 14. The men of Israel sampled their provision but did not inquire of the Lord.

The deception is not sophisticated. It's like, you know, your letter from the bank, and it's full of spelling mistakes. Although one wonders sometimes. It's not very sophisticated. They didn't notice the accent, but the people seem to say the right things. Look at verse 9. Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. They used the right language. They seemed to present well. They had the right look. And if you're going to do a con, by the way, this is conning people 101. It's really important to get the right look. They didn't have it. It wasn't very sophisticated, but the key is they didn't inquire of the Lord. In Hebrew, the mouth of Jehovah they did not ask. They should have inquired through Eliezer, the high priest. There was another thing they used called the umen and the thumen.

Now, I don't know how the umen and the thumen worked, but they were like two devices that enabled the people of God to discern the word of the Lord. So, the apparatus was there. The church was there. The umen and the thumen were there to allow the people to show what was of God and what was not of God.

They didn't think. They didn't pray. They relied on their own politics. They relied on their own wit, and they failed.

[18 : 23] How many decisions do we make in a similar manner? Verse 14, but did not inquire of the Lord.

How many projects, how many relationships, how many days of the week do we get up? How do we formulate the strategy of the church? And it's been great to have certainly said working with the leadership of the church here, formulating a strategy, but they did not inquire of the Lord.

What does God say about this? Basically, they didn't pray about the situation. They didn't put it before the Lord and said, what does the Lord want in this situation? Now, there is the pressure to combine that which is image. You know, we live in a world where image is really, really important, but it's not just that which is chic and impressive. In this case, the humble and vulnerable, perhaps. Now, this is the thing. It is often in a situation when things seem to be clear. It's often in a situation when all seems clear that we are most vulnerable. Open doors are not always right doors. They may be, they often are, maybe even they usually are, but not always.

And so, we've got inquire of the Lord. There's a great example in Scripture when David is being pursued by Saul, King Saul. And he's in a cave of En Gedi. And again, it's a very humorous picture.

Saul goes into the cave to spend the penny, and David's men said to him, these 300 men saying, kill him. It's obvious. He's distracted. It's an open door here. The 300 men are saying to David, kill King Saul. It's a sitter. But David inquired of the Lord, and that's when he said, I will not lay my hand upon the Lord's anointing. Sometimes things seem obvious to do, but you inquire of the Lord, and you just get that sense. You inquire of the Lord, and how do you do that today? You get the advice of the people of God. You get principles of the Bible. You get folk who know you very, very clearly. You bounce things off. Good leaders always bounce things off other people.

[21 : 04] Ultimately, a great leader will have to make that decision, him or herself. But before that, they will have consulted. They will have taken things to get all the information, but take soundings from God himself. How many unprayed for sermons. How many unprayed for ministry situations. How many unprayed business ventures. How many unprayed relationships. We need discernment. This is how we need discernment, to know what is right and what is wrong. And you get discernment largely by spending time with God in prayer. There's a writer called George Bush, not George W. Bush, because this guy wrote in 1881.

And he said of these verses, quote, No proposed course of conduct can be so clear to a Christian as to excuse them from the duty of seeking direction from above. We really need discernment. Matthew Henry said, In all leagues of relation and friendship, we must first try, then trust, lest we repent at leisure, agreements made in haste. I really like that. The language is a little bit quaint, but I like it. We must first try, then trust, lest we repent at leisure, arrangements made in haste. So out of this passage we are seeing the need for discernment. Folks, will we be a discerning congregation as a corporate body? Will we be discerning individuals making right decisions after having inquired of the Lord, not being duped and taken in by the various ruses around? So number one, discernment. Number two, up there in the PowerPoint is integrity. Now, verse 16, it wasn't long before the ruse was exposed. Three days afterwards, the

Israelites heard that they were neighbors living in Kitor, living near them. They realized that they just lived down the road. In fact, in verse 17, there were more of them than they imagined. Integrity. So get this, the people find out that they've been duped, and the people say, kill them, zap them, exterminate.

That's what you've got to do. This is where integrity kicks in. The leaders, see that in verse 18, the whole assembly grumbled against the leaders.

But all the leaders answered, we have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel. Now, the pressure must have been really, really tough. At the congregational meeting, all the people grumbled against the leaders and said, guys, let's kill them. They've lied to us. But the leaders said, no, we made an oath. That's where integrity comes in. They had given their word. Now, it wasn't a case of their integrity. Read on. We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. It's not a case of their integrity. It's a case of God's integrity.

[24 : 45] Their integrity didn't matter. God's did. Is there an issue of integrity in our lives just now? Folks, it's not about us. It's not about our honor. It's not about our reputation.

It's about the honor of God himself. Because ultimately, in comparative terms, we don't matter.

But God does. Now, this was messy. The oath was wrongly obtained. There's a mess here.

Can I suggest that life, again, is rarely straightforward. Headlight bulbs in cars and windscreen wipers.

Lads, lassies, have you ever tried to put a headlight bulb in a car? It says in the handbook, this is straightforward. And you go in and you take the thing on. You look at the line and you take it out and it's far more complex than your windscreen wipers.

[25 : 56] Pay the three quid to half of us to do it. It's worth it. They're not so good in headlight bulbs, but they're okay in wipers. What's the point? The point there is that things that we think are straightforward in life are rarely straightforward.

This oath was obtained. There was ambiguity. It was dodgy. The leadership were honest. They've blown it.

They took on board their faults. They said, we have given them an oath. We have promised that we will not tell them. This is what we will do to them. We will let them live so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath.

We swore to them and they said, let them live. Godly leadership is not a response to a focus group, by the way. The leaders here did what was right, not what the people wanted.

It's not a democracy. That's very important. And so it's a difficult situation. To disobey would mean taking down God's wrath.

[26 : 58] We have very, very difficult decisions to make. But remember, we've got discernment. We've got to show integrity. Thirdly, we see discernment.

We see integrity. The third word that emerges from here is the word choice. This is when I'm taking the focus away from the people of God to the people of Gibeon.

I want you all to really think about this situation. Because this is one of those passages where most folk have never really thought out before. And the question is, are the Gibeonites goodies or baddies?

Are the Gibeonites honorable or dishonorable? What made them tell the lie? What made them resort to this ruse? So the word I'm looking at just now is a word of choice.

Now the Gibeonites knew enough to know Yahweh was not to be trifled with. The God of the Bible was not to be messed with. They had a respect for God.

[27 : 59] I see that in verse 25b, the second half, where they say, We are now in your hands due to us whatever seems good and right to you.

I see that in the words of the Gibeonites. I don't think they were totally at it. In verse 9, They knew that they couldn't defy the living God.

So they had to make a choice. The choice for them was, join with the kings of the West and get destroyed, or join with the people of Israel and live.

Now they could have joined with the people of Israel in a better way, but they didn't. But as I look at this passage, the wonderful thing is that in the gospel, we can come to God without a con.

We can come to God and there is no need for a ruse. There is no need for us to pretend to be what we are not. The story I often tell is that many years ago, a friend gave us a gift.

[29 : 20] And it was two nights in the Balmoral Hotel in Edinburgh. And so we turned up at the Balmoral Hotel, and we only had two children at the time, and I had a blue Fiat Chroma car, big Fiat car.

But, you know, you've got a young family. The car was at that time like a mobile skip. It was full of all sorts of things, debris, sweetie papers, crisp packets, all sorts of things.

So we drove up to the hotel, and there's what is called concierge parking. Now I'm from Paisley. I didn't know what concierge parking was.

But there's this guy in a uniform, and he parks your car. And my significant other saw the concierge, and he says, put your foot in it.

So we drove round to a filling station, got the Hoover out, cleaned the car, made it, we spent a long time basically giving it a mini-vallet, but before we returned, the concierge took the car away and parked it.

[30 : 36] What's the point of that faintly amusing little story? It's so like many of us in terms of the gospel. We feel that before we approach God, we have to clean our own lives up first.

We feel that before we approach God, that we have to get rid of all the rubbish in our lives, that we have to appear before God, pristine and spotless and valetine.

No. We don't need to do that. We don't need to clean our lives up. We don't need to resort to a ruse. I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad, and found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad.

It's what the theologians call preparationism, this idea that we've got to clean ourselves up first. No, we can't. He does the cleaning.

He has the power to clean our sin. And so we don't need to come with a ruse. We don't need to come. He takes the muddle and He takes the deceit.

[31 : 45] Now, may I know an interesting contrast here? There's an Old Testament scholar called John Hamlin. And John Hamlin goes behind the scenes here, and he says what we have here is an acted parallel.

You see, Canaanite society had various symbols. For example, they believed that wool and flax, the basic products for clothing, were gifts of Baal.

And the wine, of course, was one of the gifts of Baal. And so, isn't it interesting here that Hamlin says it's like they're acting out of parallel.

Canaanite society was worn out, moldy bread, whereas the children of Israel had fresh manna. So, we've got a contrast here, don't we, between the worn-out emblems of Canaanite society, the worn-out clothes, the worn wineskin, the moldy bread, compared to the freshness of the kingdom, the freshness of the people of God.

And so there are parallels in our own culture, the worn-out nature of our own fallen culture, compared to the values of the kingdom, the entropy, the redundancy of the world, the freshness of the kingdom of God.

[33 : 19] We are people of the new wine. The Canaanite faith was the old wineskin in parabolic form, in the shape of what the Gibeonites brought to God, their old, old wineskins.

And so we're seeing here what God brought these people. We're seeing all these things here. We're seeing discernment. We're seeing integrity. We're seeing choice.

The Gibeonites chose, even in an unorthodox way, to follow God. That brings me to my fourth, and if I remember correctly, final point, and that is grace.

Grace. Now, it's all very grubby. They've escaped the wrath of God, but they've used this ruse of the worn-out clothes and the moldy bread.

It really is very unorthodox. The Gibeonites were rank outsiders. This was always the case.

[34 : 29] They were rank outsiders, and yet the leaders of the people said, take them in. Take them in with all their complexity, with all their mess.

Take the outsiders in. Now, the really intriguing and smart thing is that not only were they taken in, but they were given a place at the temple.

Okay, they were called, in verse 23, they were to be woodcutters and carriers of water, but they were involved in the worship of the temple.

It's really quite extraordinary, isn't it? that these rank outsiders are not just taken in, but they are taken in as servants in the very heart of the worship of the people of God.

Now, I'm going to not just prove that, but to those of you who are still cynical, I'm going to show how Scripture looks very, very kindly on the Gibeonites.

[35 : 38] And so, we find there, in verse 15, these great words, and Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live. And the leaders of the assembly ratified it by, well, to me, that's the gospel.

Joshua, think of our greater Joshua, Jesus, made a treaty of peace with them to let them live. They were no longer considered enemies.

They were brought in. They were brought right in. And grace transforms the most unlikely situation. And grace brings the Gibeonites and the Israelites together, the unlikely lads, the strange bedfellows.

And that's the wonderful thing about a church. The weird and the wonderful are brought together. The folk who would never go on in any other area of society are brought together in the church of God.

The outsider is brought together. And we see this all through Joshua. Rahab and her family, they were outsiders that they brought in.

[36 : 42] And at the end of the day, the Gibeonites, I believe, knew that God was God and submitted to him. And so, I think they're faithful to God and God is faithful to them.

Look at verse 26. It says there, So Joshua saved them from the Israelites. It's the only time that word saved is used of Joshua. So Joshua saved them from the Israelites and they did not kill them.

Do you know, we're almost at the end, do you know that every single reference to the Gibeonites from then on is absolutely, utterly positive.

Do you know that? In verse 27, they're given daily access to the tabernacle. In chapter 10, the sun stands still.

Why? To protect who? The Gibeonites. In 2 Samuel 21, God brought a famine to Israel to force them to honor who?

[37 : 50] The Gibeonites. Where was the Ark of the Covenant stationed? Sunday School 101. It was stationed at Gibeon.

In 1 Kings 3, Solomon asks for wisdom. Where? At Gibeon. 1 Chronicles 12.4, one of David's mighty men, one of David's elite forces was what?

A Gibeonite. Israel's slaves became God's free men. There's grace at work. There is a curse, yes, but the curse is turned into a blessing.

The Gibeonites were far away and they're brought near. This is the mission of God. He brings those who are far away, those across the land, we were singing, from every tribe and nation of the people of God.

The Gibeonites never, ever, ever return to their roots. Nehemiah 7.25, Nehemiah's building the wall. Who does he get to build the wall with him?

[39 : 03] The Gibeonites are there. Every time they're mentioned, they're working for the kingdom, they're at the heart of the kingdom, they're building now the covenant of God. There are no outsiders.

Tonight, folk, whoever you are, you're not outside the covenant. You're not, you're brought in. Let me conclude. Let's land the plane. I see the landing lights of the airport.

Let's come into land here. Again, I've got this great quote. Sums it all up. Again, but by Matthew Henry, the commentator. He says this, Let us then imitate the Gibeonites and make our peace with God in the rags of humiliation, godly sorrow and mortification, so that our iniquity will not be a ruin.

Let us be servants to Jesus, our blessed Joshua, and make a league with him and the Israel of God and we shall live. Old school language, make a league, make peace with him and the Israel of God and we shall live.

God turns grubby, gray, mistaken outsiders into daughters and sons of a king.

[40 : 24] Those who were far off were brought near. The Gibeonites were far off and they will be brought near, so, again, the invitation is for every one of us and to recognize that there is no one beyond the grace of God.

We say no too often for other people. We look at a Gibeonite or their equivalent today and we say never, never, never. And yet God says, no, no, I will bring them in.

In my prayer, that this church fills up with people from Cantor, with people who are the Gibeonites of today and we are all together united round the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word for its clarity and power. Speak with us. Leave us with your blessing.

Thank you for the radical nature of the gospel. Those far off are brought near. Forgive our many sins.

[41 : 42] Amen.