

Enter at Your Own Rest

Studies in the Book of Joshua

"Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it"

Alan Redpath

Text

Joshua 9:1-27

Topic

The Gibeonites trick Joshua into a treaty

Title

"Trick or Treaty"

Joshua 9:1 And it came to pass when all the kings who *were* on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon - the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite - heard *about it*,

Joshua 9:2 that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.

Joshua 9:3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,

Joshua 9:4 they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended,

Joshua 9:5 old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* moldy.

Joshua 9:6 And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us."

Joshua 9:7 Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?"

Joshua 9:8 But they said to Joshua, "We *are* your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who *are* you, and where do you come from?"

Joshua 9:9 So they said to him: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt,

Joshua 9:10 and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* beyond the Jordan - to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth.

Joshua 9:11 Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We *are* your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us." '

Joshua 9:12 This bread of ours we took hot *for* our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy.

Joshua 9:13 And these wineskins which we filled *were* new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."

Joshua 9:14 Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD.

Joshua 9:15 So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

Joshua 9:16 And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbors who dwelt near them.

Joshua 9:17 Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities *were* Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim.

Joshua 9:18 But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.

Joshua 9:19 Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them.

Joshua 9:20 This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them."

Joshua 9:21 And the rulers said to them, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them."

Joshua 9:22 Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We *are* very far from you,' when you dwell near us?"

Joshua 9:23 Now therefore, you *are* cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves - woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."

Joshua 9:24 So they answered Joshua and said, "Because your servants were clearly told that the LORD your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing.

Joshua 9:25 And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us."

Joshua 9:26 So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them.

Joshua 9:27 And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.

Introduction

I was touched in my studying this week by this quote from beloved Christian pastor and author A.W. Tozer:

We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church.

Who I think God is, and what I believe He is like, will direct how I treat everyone I encounter.

Or the opposite is true – how I treat people reveals who I think God is and what I believe He is like.

Let's apply that to our story in Joshua chapter nine. The Gibeonites understood that God had told the Israelites to **destroy all the inhabitants of the land** (v24). True, but incomplete. At Jericho God spared Rahab and her family showing that He would save those who believed and repented. The Gibeonites determined to deceive Joshua because of their incomplete knowledge of God.

As for the Israelites: When approached by the Gibeonites their first thoughts were that these people might be marked for destruction. They were. But, again, God had shown mercy upon such people already. Their single-mindedness about God's judgment kept them from asking His counsel.

The Israelites and the Gibeonites portray an incomplete picture of God. They both fail to reveal the **goodness** of God.

As an attribute of God His goodness includes His benevolence, mercy, pity, and compassion upon us all. Towards the lost His goodness is manifested as His longsuffering with them - not being willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance.

We encounter 'Gibeonites' everyday. For the most part they misunderstand God's goodness. It's up to us to reveal it to them so we'd better have a handle on it.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The People You Encounter Tend To Misunderstand God's Goodness, and #2 Tend To The People You Encounter By Magnifying God's Goodness.

#1 The People You Encounter
Tend To Misunderstand God's Goodness
(v1-15)

The deception of the Gibeonites was wrong. But once they were among the Israelites they enjoyed a rich spiritual heritage:

- On account of the covenant with them Joshua wins a notable military victory defending them in chapter ten as the sun stands still so that Israel can subdue her enemies.
- Later in Jewish history David will pitch the Tabernacle at Gibeon (First Chronicles 16:39).
- One of David's 'mighty men,' Ishmaiah, will be a Gibeonite (First Chronicles 12:4).
- God will speak to King Solomon at Gibeon (First Kings 3:4).
- In the days of Nehemiah the Gibeonites are among those who rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:7 & 7:25).

Their story is an example of God's goodness at work. They may have misunderstood God, but they sought Him nevertheless. He responded with mercy and compassion.

The Gibeonites stand in stark contrast to their neighbors named in the opening verses:

Joshua 9:1 And it came to pass when all the kings who *were* on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon - the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite - heard *about it*,

Joshua 9:2 that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.

These people had **heard** about God for over four hundred years. They had especially **heard** of the Israelites for the past forty years, since the crossing of the Red Sea. Now that Joshua had led them into the Promised Land they had **heard** about their victories at Jericho and at Ai. God was zeroing in on them. His judgment was about to fall. But in His wrath He had remembered mercy and was giving them time to repent.

They **gathered together to fight** against God. They refused God's goodness. They despised God's mercy. In the end they would get what they deserved.

They represent all those in every age with whom our God is longsuffering but who refuse His goodness and despise His mercy. They must finally get what they deserve if they will not let God's goodness lead them to repentance.

I've said that the Gibeonites misunderstood God's goodness. How so?

First, they thought they could make themselves look like they deserved God's goodness. They disguised themselves as people from a far country. They might have known that God's Law (Deuteronomy 20) allowed the Israelites to enter into treaties with people who were from far countries outside the Promised Land.

People you encounter often try to make themselves look like they deserve God's goodness. They do it through morality or religion or by comparing themselves to people who are worse than they are. But none of us can ever deserve God's goodness.

There is a second way the Gibeonites misunderstood God's goodness. They thought they could earn God's goodness. In verses eight, nine, and eleven the Gibeonites stress their desire to be **servants** – as if they can earn God's favor with their works on His behalf.

It doesn't 'work' that way. There is nothing we can do to earn God's goodness – not before we're saved and not after we're saved.

By the way, God's goodness always transcends our circumstances. Whether I abound or am abased; whether I am being blessed or buffeted; God is good.

The amazing thing to me is that despite their crafty deception God still manifested His goodness to the Gibeonites! There is no word of condemnation from God against them. Instead, as we noted, they begin to occupy a blessed place among God's people. He brought them in among His people and, over time, established them.

I want to accurately portray the goodness of God. Which brings us to our second point,

#2 Tend To The People You Encounter By Magnifying God's Goodness (v16-27)

We don't want to miss a very obvious but important lesson. In verse fourteen we read **the men of Israel... did not ask counsel of the Lord.**

It seemed evident that the Gibeonites had travelled from afar. Whether things seem evident or not we ought always to **ask counsel**

of the Lord. True, God has given to us sanctified common sense. But the most 'common sense' thing we can do is to pray and seek the Lord in **everything** – no matter how slight.

If Joshua and the Israelites had asked counsel of the Lord, what do you think He would have said? He certainly would have exposed their deception. But would He have expected Joshua to exterminate them or to extend them mercy?

Our answer would be mere speculation. Still, it reveals what we think about God. Perhaps another quote, this one by Norman Geisler, might help us. He said,

We are saved by God's grace but grace isn't deserved by any sinner. Justice demands that sin be condemned. There is nothing in a sinner that prompts God to save him; instead, justice must condemn him. However, there is something in God that prompts Him to save sinners, namely, His love. Since God is all-loving by nature, **He must try to save sinners!**

That is how I want to portray God to all the 'Gibeonites' I encounter – **as Someone who must try to save sinners.**

In His goodness God is always just and must condemn sin and judge the sinner. But also in His goodness He is *a/ways* merciful and can forgive the repentant sinner and save him or her. God is infinitely just and infinitely merciful at the same time.

That is how I want to portray God to all the 'Gibeonites' I encounter – as Someone who must try to save sinners.

The people we encounter tend to misunderstand God's goodness. They don't see how He can be both just and merciful. They mostly think of Him as just and therefore somewhat cruel and impersonal.

There's nothing more personal than sending your Son to die on a Cross for the sins of the human race.

Yes, God is going to judge the earth. The time is short. The rapture is imminent. All the more reason to make sure people understand God is longsuffering towards them, that He is willing to save them by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, that in His goodness He can forgive them their sin and save them.

Truth is, before we were saved we were in the same position as the condemned people in the Promised Land. We were outside the covenant God made with Israel. We deserved the judgment of God. Yet He must try to save us – and, if you are a believer, in His infinite goodness He did by extending you mercy.

If people are going to reject God let's at least be sure they know that they are rejecting a loving God who must try to save them.

How can we better portray and therefore extend God's goodness to people we encounter?

First, we already mentioned that we are **to ask counsel of the Lord**. Here is something to consider. The Israelites had just returned from a retreat at Shechem where they had read and reviewed the Law of God. Perhaps being confident they knew the letter of the Law they missed the spirit of it?

Jesus was confronted with the woman caught in adultery. The letter of the Law said she must be stoned. But the spirit of the Law was for her to **go and sin no more**.

Without ever compromising God's Word we must ask His counsel to apply it in its spirit towards those whom He loves.

Second, we can portray and therefore extend God's goodness to people we encounter by patiently instructing them in the things of God. Look at verses twenty-one through twenty-seven,

Joshua 9:21 And the rulers said to them, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them."

Joshua 9:22 Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We *are* very far from you,' when you dwell near us?"

Joshua 9:23 Now therefore, you *are* cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves - woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."

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Joshua 9:27 And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.

Their 'punishment' was to serve the Lord in His Tabernacle! It would be the best place to discover the grace and mercy of God. The Gibeonites would see, on a daily basis, God's goodness toward sinners.

They were already starting to learn about God's goodness from Joshua. Even though they had deceived the Israelites, Joshua and the **rulers** determined to keep their word to them. The Gibeonites responded by saying, **here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us**. It was a direct appeal to mercy based on the goodness of God they saw in Joshua and the rulers.

Our instruction from God's Word; our worship; our Children's Ministry; our ushering; our set-up and tear-down; our greeting; everything we do ought to be instructing people about the goodness of God.

Every encounter we have outside of Church ought to be instructing people about the goodness of God.

Let me rephrase all that: **Everything we do in or out of the church IS instructing people about the goodness of God.** Thus it is important that my understanding, and that your understanding, and that our understanding, of God's goodness be accurate.

I quoted A.W. Tozer to begin our study. The remainder of the quote makes for a good end:

The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy, and His unfailing attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank, and friendly. By His nature He is inclined to bestow blessedness and He takes holy pleasure in the happiness of His people.

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