

Romans 5:12-21: Abounding Grace

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 July 2007

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Again, the text is Joshua 9 on page 175 of the Pew Bible.

Please stand out of reverence for God's word. As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country, and in the lowland, all along the coast of the great sea towards Lamedon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites heard of this.

They gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel. But then the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai. They, on their part, acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took out worn-out sacks for their donkeys and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with worn-out patched sandals on their feet and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us.

But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, Perhaps you live among us. Then how can we make a covenant with you? They said to Joshua, We are your servants. And Joshua said to them, Who are you and where do you come from?

[1 : 35] They said to him, From a distant country your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God. For we have heard a report of him and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth.

So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go meet them, and say to them, We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us.

Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses, as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you. But now, behold, it is dry and crumbly. These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst.

And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey. So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord.

And Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them. At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that there were their neighbors.

[2 : 50] I'm sorry. They heard that they were their neighbors, and that they lived among them. And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Kephiroth, Beiroth, and Kiriath-Yearim.

But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. But all the leaders said to all the congregation, We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. This we will do to them.

Let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them. And the leaders said to them, Let them live. So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them.

Joshua summoned them, and he said to them, Why did you deceive us, saying, We are very far from you when you dwell among us? Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.

[4 : 00] They answered Joshua, Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the

inhabitants of the land from before you.

So we feared greatly for our lives, because of what you and did this thing. And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it.

So he did this to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, to this day in the place that he should choose.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Good afternoon.

It's good to be in God's house again. Once again, we are returning to the book of Joshua. We began there this fall, and we are coming back beginning in chapter 9.

[5 : 20] In view of our being away from the book for a while, a bit of review is in order to help us be brought up to speed as it relates to the book.

One of the ways that we can describe what is going on in the book of Joshua. It's like a football team that is moving down the field, marching down the field.

God's people. God's people in the book of Joshua are on the move. While the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remained as the head coach of the team, Joshua had replaced Moses as the quarterback, as it were, on the field.

But it's interesting that the game plan really had not changed. The agenda was conquest.

The game plan, and we see this in the book of Joshua, the game plan had not changed, and it had been really prepared by Moses.

[6 : 30] Oftentimes, we hear this refrain in the book of Joshua, as the Lord commanded Moses. As the Lord commanded Moses. Again, it seemed like the game plan had not changed, and the task for Joshua really was executing the plan that had already been given by God.

The land that had been promised to them by God lay before them. But other people had occupied the land.

The Canaanite people, it seems like, they hadn't opened their mail recently because God had sent them an eviction notice. And they found out that they were not going to go without a fight.

It was because of the wickedness of the Amorites. Genesis chapter 15, the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full then, but it was full here.

But also because of the weakness of the people of God, that God said the people need to be exterminated from the land. The take the land initiative, based on God's promises, demanded the faith and the courage of the leadership, as well as people alike.

[7 : 59] I don't know if you've noticed, but faith and courage are key ingredients to the Christian life. You and I need faith and courage today.

Without these very critical Christian life components, we fall flat on our faces. We fall flat in our goal to live God-honoring lives, lives that glorify God as individual.

Our vision to see the neighborhoods of Chicago transformed by the power of the gospel really fizzles without faith and courage.

I don't know if you're involved in the 312 initiative, praying for three people over two years, in hopes that God would bring one of them to Christ.

Faith and courage and persistence are needed. We are paralyzed in the Christian life, friend, without faith and courage. And thus the word of the Lord in Joshua chapter 1 was right for God's people then and right for you and me today.

[9 : 10] You remember those wonderful words, Be strong and courageous for you shall cause the people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

It says it again in verse 9. Have I not commended you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened. Do not be dismayed.

For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Faith and courage are needed for the Christian life. With those words of assurance in chapter 1, the conquest begins in earnest.

The word of encouragement from above, chapter 1. The word of encouragement from below in chapter 2, where we hear from Rahab that the people are weakened and they are shaking in their boots because they know that you're on the way here, huh?

Boosted by these things from above and below, the people of God crossed the Jordan River, took the central cities of Jericho and Ai.

[10 : 21] Along the way, there were ceremonies and celebrations that acknowledged the Lord's good favor. There were recommitments and encouragements.

And yes, there were setbacks, particularly the disobedience of Achan and the consequences for God's people. When sin won, when sin ruled, the conquest stopped.

When the sin was judged, the place of defeat then became the place of victory. Look at chapter 8 in Joshua. You see there that it closes with this covenant renewal worship service.

And this was in obedience to the Lord's command given in Deuteronomy chapter 27. God's word was read in the hearing of God's people.

God's word was read in the hearing of God's people. And so what you had there, had you been present on that particular day, you would have heard an unrestrained chorus of amens.

[11:32] It would have been like you were in an African American church on that day had you been in that particular service. But having then established a foothold in the center of the promised land, the conquest could now begin into other parts north and south until it was finished.

And so we come to Joshua chapter 9. It's a great, it's a very, very rich chapter. It is full of good jewels and nuggets and scholars like Daniel Hawk and Richard Hess really are helpful in uncovering what is actually here.

Time won't allow us to explore everything or to bring every bit out. However, we must not fail to see the similarities in this account that we have today with the Rahab account in Joshua chapter 2.

It is there that we find another outsider and her family. And in rather questionable ways, they found refuge amongst the people of God.

A vow is secured to preserve the lives of her family members. And here we have in chapter 9, there is a larger group who through cunning device, they do something similar to what we see in Joshua chapter 2.

[13:12] Once again, people who are marked for judgment are found to escape the judgment. God's grace spilled over the boundaries of Israel and to the lives and into the experience of those who were deemed outsiders in that day.

So it was on the heels of this victory at Ai and the covenant renewal that we have this chapter. The motion of the covenant renewal service is gone.

It's no longer there. The reading of the word is over. The antiphonal response is over. The people have dispersed back to their tents, but new challenges are ready to be faced.

And quickly in chapter 9, we see the source of those challenges. Look at chapter 9, verses 1 and 2. As soon as the kings who were beyond the Jordan and the hill country and in the lowlands all along the coast of the great sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites heard this, they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.

Upon hearing the activities of the people of God, the majority of the people in the area united to fight against Israel and Joshua.

[14:47] But unlike what we see in verses 1 and 2, or what we see in chapter 2, where the inhabitants of the land are gripped by fear, we see this both in chapter 2 and chapter 5, here they are emboldened to fight against the people of God.

Why the difference? Could they have seen that Israel was indeed vulnerable? They did lose the battle initially at Ai? Could they have seen that these people perhaps are not as formidable as we thought that they were?

Huh? We see that again in perhaps the vulnerability of Israel was seen through their laws. But then we see another group of people. We see the Gibeonites in verses 3 through 13.

And this is what I would like for you to see. The Gibeonites engage in deceit. You will see after that the Israelites' failure to exercise discernment.

And then finally we'll look at the Lord's extension of his grace in these verses. The Gibeonites' engagement in deceit.

[16:02] The tactics of the inhabitants of Gibeon differed from the leaders of the nations mentioned in verses 1 and 2. It highlights a contrast, what we see in verse 3.

Look at verse 3 with me. But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard that Joshua, or what he had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, so forth and so on.

A difference, huh? It was like they were saying, if you can't beat them, let's join them. Huh? It's clear from the text before us that the Gibeonites had done their homework.

They had done their research in a way. And notice some of the things that their research, their homework had yielded. In verse 9, they were aware of the fame, of the renown of Israel's God. Look at verse 9. They said to him, From a very distant country, Your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God. For we have heard a report of him and all that he did in Egypt. [17:16] Basically, they were name-dropping. That's what they were doing. But still the report of the exploits of God had come into their view. They had heard of his exploits in Egypt.

They had heard of the Amorite king's defeat beyond the Jordan. They had heard of the command of the Lord to Moses as it concerned the land and the destruction of the inhabitants.

In verse 24. And in view of these very things, they have developed a plan for their self-preservation for survival.

Ken Hughes, in his book on Joshua, entitled *The Living on the Cutting Edge*, he dubs the actions of these Gibeonites as an Oscar-winning performance.

Can't you see that there? One would have to agree that this is one of the great stories of deception in all of Scripture. Makeup, wardrobe, words, all that fit the occasion.

[18:20] They addressed and acted the part of those who were from a distant place. And it seems like their investigation included the discovery that the Lord handled those in distant places differently than those who were near.

As a matter of fact, I need you to turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 20, and you will see that in God's law, his tactic, his game plan, called for a different way of dealing with those who were distant, a distance from Israel, the land that she was going to occupy, and those who were up close. Look at chapter 20 and verse 10. When you draw near to the city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it, and if it responds to you peaceably and opens to you, then all the people who were found in it shall do forced labor for you and serve you.

Listen to the language. But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it, and when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword, but the women and the little ones, the livestock and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as plunder for yourselves, and you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you.

Specifically, note verse 15. Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you which are not cities of the nations here.

[19:58] Had they gotten wind of this particular kind of directive? But look at verse 16. But in the cities of the peoples that the Lord your God has given you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes.

Exterminate it all. But you shall devote them to complete destruction. And he goes on to give these nations, verse 18, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices. That was the reason for extermination. And it's also the weakness of the people that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God. So they cast themselves in the mold of those who are far away.

The options then were for forced labor and those cities that were far away and death for the peoples in the cities of the promised land. And according to this text, the Gibeonites, where the Hivites, were marked for death, but they presented themselves as candidates for forced labor. The Gibeonite deception, and we can say more about that, but I want to move on to the Israelites' failure to exercise discernment. Several weeks ago, I preached from Luke chapter 16 where we had the parable of the shrewd manager, where Jesus commended this man for his shrewd insight, and he used present opportunities to secure his future well-being.

[21:32] And he commended him, he applauded him, as he said, the children, the sons of darkness, are more wise in their generation than the children of light. Do you have something similar here? Another incident of shrewdness, of craftiness and cunning.

They saw the handwriting on the wall, and they acted in order to secure their well-being. The outsider was more diligent than the insider, those who were enlightened.

And had the Israelites been as diligent as the Gibeonites, the situation would have gone differently. The clever, creative response of the Gibeonites contrasted with the lackluster, blasé response of the people of God who had the very promises of God.

The Gibeonites had done their homework. Israel, like a child that hasn't learned the value of doing homework, failed to do due diligence.

The response of the leaders acting on behalf of the nation is recorded in verses 14 and 15. Look at that with me. So the men took some of their provisions and did not ask counsel from the Lord.

[22 : 49] And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live. And the leaders of the congregation swore to them. Huh? Here's the deal.

They saw the clothes. They saw the sandals. They saw the worn-out sacks. They saw the worn-out wineskins. Furthermore, according to verse 14, they had sampled the bread, but they failed to exercise discernment.

There was a measure of curiosity and perhaps suspicion, but they did not seek counsel from the mouth of God. Friends, it's very easy for you and me to be people who are ruled and dominated by our senses.

And exhausted Esau, devalued his birthright because he couldn't see beyond a piping hot bowl of red stew. Isaac, listen to this, though he heard Jacob's voice, tasted the savory game and felt the animal skin and he uttered a blessing still that was reserved for the firstborn.

Samuel was checked by God at Jesse's house when he was tempted to be swayed by good looks and tall height, stature of the son of Jesse.

[24 : 17] He was reminded that the Lord's standards are different than the standards of man. Don't be deceived by his height for the Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance.

God looks on the heart. Let's not fail to exercise discernment. A slick college brochure. An attractive benefit package.

The look of success. The right degrees and pedigrees of those who pursue us or those that we pursue. Not that these things are not worthy of consideration.

We still need to, in these and other things, seek counsel from the mouth of God. If you're seeking a college or career or a companion, the question is, have you asked counsel from the Lord?

You know what Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 says, don't you? We quote it often. Trust the Lord with all your own heart and what? Lean not to your own understanding in all your ways.

[25 : 29] Acknowledge him. He'll direct your paths. Be not wise, he says, in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil.

Sometimes it's not what we do, but what we leave undone that can come back to haunt us. Listen, oh, I love Luther's word. Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be what?

Losing. We're not the right man on our side. The man of God's own choosing. You ask that who that might be. Christ Jesus, it is he.

Lord, Sabaoth, Lord of hosts, is his name. For age to age the same. We must win the battle. We fool ourselves if we think that we can get by in life without doing due diligence.

A natural step for you and me of sound decision making for God's people should be seeking counsel for the Lord. This is especially true for leaders.

[26 : 37] Huh? The Gibeonites engaged in deception. The Israelites failed to exercise discernment. You've got these dynamics from those on the outside, but you've got these dynamics from those on the inside.

The Israelites dropped their guard, and because of that, they were deceived. We see the leaders of Israel, they confronted the Gibeonites. Their deceit was uncovered.

But there was also an oath that would preserve them, to treat them as sojourners. And this is where commentaries like Hess and Hulk are really good because they connect this whole idea of chopping wood and drawing water with the covenant in Deuteronomy chapter 29, verse 12 and following.

We can't get to it. But in the midst, but here is what we want to look at. In the midst of the deception of the Gibeonites and the lack of discernment of the Israelites, you say, where's the gospel in all of this?

Where's the good news in it all? In the midst of this wheeling and dealing, we see the Lord's extension of his grace, even in the midst of it.

[27 : 53] And guess who are the ones who are candidates for God's grace? It is both the outsider as well as the insider. Both are candidates for God's grace.

Those who are deceived as well as those who are doing the deceiving, deceitful Gibeonites are recipients of God's grace. The Gibeonites reveal their faith and their fears.

And what you see in there, in essence in verse 22 and following, was the confession and surrender. And Joshua dealt graciously with them. Particularly, look at verse 26.

I love this verse. So he did this to them. And notice what he did. Delivered them. He saved them out of the hand of the people of Israel.

And they did not kill them. He delivered them from judgment. He performed the task of a deliverer. He rescued them from death.

[28 : 55] And in Joshua's act of deliverance, the gracious work of the Lord Jesus Christ, his New Testament namesake is mirrored. In Christ, outsiders become insiders, not on the basis of their works, but by grace.

And those who are marked for death are rescued and saved and preserved. Let them live! Verse 20 and 21. Such is the cry of the cross of Christ.

Let them live! Because I have died. He delivers outsiders and makes them insiders through his work. And live they did.

The testimony of Scripture is that they were integrated into the family of God, serving God's people. people, the threat, neutralized them. We see them in other places in Scripture.

They became servants amongst the people of God, performing the most menial tasks. But still in the midst of God's people, I think of them when I think of Psalm 84 and 10.

[30 : 02] And I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. We must see God's grace, friends, as being all-encompassing, reaching the most distant outsider.

Outsiders who trust in the living God through his Son become insiders. The Lord graciously dealt with the Gibeonites, but he also graciously dealt with the Israelites who received God's undeserved favor.

Israelites who failed at discernment also were extended grace. Their failure at discernment was not fatal.

The journey didn't stop. They continued on. Hopefully the lessons were learned. And when they think back at Gibeon and what could have been but was stayed by the grace of God, hopefully they learned some lessons.

The presence of the Gibeonites should have been a constant reminder of their failure, but also a reminder of God's grace. Gibeonites saved by grace.

[31 : 12] Outsiders become insiders. The Israelites preserved by grace. Insiders disciplined, but continued. Oh, friends, look at the triumph of the grace of God.

You've got this conflict as you work through chapter 9, but you come to this resolution by the end of the chapter, and it's the triumph of the grace of God.

Those who are deserved to die are by grace, allowed to live. Outsiders become insiders, not on the basis of cleverness or craft, but by grace.

Those with the promises must be as alert, and the success of the mission needs the discernment, your discernment, friends, both personally in our lives, throughout our journey, as well as in the life of our church.

We needn't make excuses, friends, for asking counsel of God. We needn't fear the label of trying to be spiritual.

[32 : 18] No, you and I need the counsel of God. Regardless of the labels that people might want to put to it, we need to acknowledge God and listen to Him.

We're coming in a bit to the Lord's table. The Lord's table is for outsiders who will become insiders through God's gracious work through His Son.

And if you have received Christ, if you have embraced Him, you're welcome to come to the table today and be strengthened by Him.

Be reminded that those who are rescued by Him are sustained by Him. and I don't know where you are in life and your journey or what you're faced with, but come today to this table.

Be nourished. No, you don't have to be the perfect man or woman. You need to be in Christ. You need to be, have come from the outside and a part of God's family.

[33 : 34] And you can come today and partake of this table. Let's bow our heads. Let's look to the Lord. Father, we come and once again, we see the triumph of the grace of God.

Triumph for outsiders and insiders. Lord, you win. And we praise you, Lord, for all of us who are people who are far, but we are brought near through the blood of Christ.

We treasure you, Lord, and we love you. Lord, we praise you for the echo of the grace of God.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

Once was lost, now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see. I'm going to ask David to come. We're going to prepare for the Lord's table.
And as I do this, let me read from 1 Corinthians chapter.