Joshua 9 "Rule in Hell or Serve in Heaven?"

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[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?
The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.
Let's just please bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would continue to fall with gentle but deep power. Father, we ask that you would do something miraculous in our lives this morning, that you would bring to our attention and to our mind the idols whom we enthrone in our hearts.
And you would help us, Father, to also see the beauty of the gospel and how it is that you see us and how you work to deliver us from slavery to our idols. So we ask that your Holy Spirit would move in our lives deeply, bringing the gospel home. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.
[2:01] We have a complicated relationship with being seen. We sort of don't necessarily recognize that we have a complicated relationship with it, but we do have a complicated relationship with it. On one hand, we wish that we had a boss that saw what we were doing and appreciated it. And many of us work in situations where our boss doesn't seem to see what we're doing and appreciate it. And that's very, very frustrating. Some of us have bosses or have had bosses that look and watch very closely what we're doing, but it's only to belittle us, to make fun of us, or to find more evidence against us.

For two years, I saw Louise, the woman who's now my wife, I saw her in different places in university, and I hoped that she would see me. And maybe when she saw me, maybe think, maybe I should get to know that fellow. I saw her and I wished that she would see me.
You know, one of the problems that many people have is maybe they're, as they age, maybe if they have handicaps, is that people don't really see them. They just see the gray hair or they just see the handicap, but they don't see through that to see the real person who's there. Or maybe they just see the color of our skin, but don't see through that to see the real person who's there. And we can go on and on and on. We have complicated relationships to being seen. And in fact, if we were honest, and seen others as they really are. The Bible texts that we're going to look at today, you know, like a lot of Bible, like a lot of narratives, especially in the book of Joshua, it seems to be about this and this and this and this. And one of the reasons we're doing Joshua is that even though it is like ground zero of a place where people will attack the Christian faith and say, that's why you shouldn't be a Christian and you shouldn't believe the Bible. But if you deal with those objections, because of those objections, we don't want to read the book, and they frighten us. But the book regularly has these profound truths to tell us, which are really, really valuable. And so on one level, the book seems to be about this. But if you meditate with it and sit upon it, sit with it, you realize it has some very profound things to talk about how the
Lord sees people, how he sees you, and in particular, how he sees you in a way that is filled with grace. And it's beautiful. And if it starts to grip your heart, you'd wish it was true for you, or more true

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for you. So we're looking at Joshua chapter 9. We're preaching through the book of Joshua, not everything verse by verse. And during the announcements, I'll tell a little bit about how we're going to... The last three sermons, obviously, there's a lot of books left, the things that we're going to look at. But we're looking at Joshua 9, because it's a very important story to understand the book of Joshua. And what's basically about... The book of Joshua is about how the Jewish people come into the Promised Land, how God fights for them, and so on. There's two things going on in the book of Joshua. One is that there's a punishment of the inhabitants there. And next Sunday, I'm going to bring together all of those threads about that, to have one sort of sermon finishing that whole thing about the hard parts in the book and God's judgment on the people who are already there. So on one hand, it's a judgment on the people who are there. And on the other hand, it is Israel entering the Promised Land. And depending on how you date it, whether it's dated around the year 1400, around the year 1200 BC, there's been a Jewish presence in the Promised Land from that date till today. Not always, obviously, ruling it, but there's been a Jewish presence. And the book of Joshua is about how the Jewish people come into what we, what they would call, what the Bible calls, the Promised Land.

And well, we'll start reading, and I'll go back and fill in a little bit more of the context. And let's look at chapter, at verses one and two. And at chapter nine, it goes like this. As soon as all the kings who are beyond the Jordan, in the hill country, and in the lowland, all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, now we're going to get a list of names, which for most of us will start to blur and fall asleep like this. But I'm going to read them anyway.

[6:32] The Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. When all of them heard of this, they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and all Israel. Now, just sort of pause before we go any further. In some ways, what these, that these first two verses are, it would be a little bit as if you heard a voiceover on a, you know, a Netflix or a Prime or a Disney series. And, and the voiceover describes what's going to happen in the next four episodes, nine, 10, 11, and 12. And that's what they do. The countries and the people groups that are mentioned, if you had a map, you'll see that they're scattered. They're a representative scattering of the entire promised land. And so what it's saying is that what's going to happen from this point on, and we're going to return to it, but the, the line here, when they heard of this, at the very end of verse one, when they heard of this, that's important, which we'll return to, they basically decide they're going to stop. Because normally what would happen is they would have been spending their time fighting each other and killing each other, right? That's what they normally would do. Their kingdoms would get bigger and smaller as they fought, invaded, defended against being invaded. And they decided, we're going to stop fighting each other, and we're going to all unite, and we're going to attack Israel, and we're going to defeat Israel. And that's sort of the big theme of chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12. But then there's one of, I keep joking, someday I'm going to write a book called The Big Butts of the Bible, or Why the Bible Likes Big Butts.

And I think just with that title, it would be a huge seller, by the way. But there's one of the Bible's big butts to start verse three. But, it's a big but, when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they, on their part, now just before we go any further, you're going to discover later on that Gibeon is one of the people, one of the, a part of the Hivite people group. So, they're part of that group. Everybody else is uniting, and gonna, and they're gonna fight Israel. But there's a group that's going to do something different, a subgroup of one of the groups that's going to do something different. Verse three again, but when the inhabitants, inhabitants of Gibeon heard that Joshua, what Joshua 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 and wine skins, 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. This is all part of them being cunning. They're gonna lie, and they're gonna deceive. That's what they're gonna do. Their solution is not to fight, but to lie and deceive. And verse six, and they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him, and to the men of Israel, and just, just, sorry, this is just to help you read. Men of Israel is almost always a euphemism for their army. So, that's, that's the armed forces, okay? That's what it means. So, they, that's why it would be wrong to translate it men and women of Israel, because it's a euphemism for their army. And to the men of Israel, by the way, I think they should just translate it army. I don't know why they translated men of Israel, but that's a separate issue. We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us. But the men of Israel, the army, said to the

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Hivites, perhaps you live among us. Then how can we make a covenant with you? Because they'd known that the Lord said, you can't make any covenants with the people in the promised land. You can make covenants and treaties with people outside the covenant, the promised land, but you can't with those within the promised land. And that's because they're under the Lord's judgment, and other reasons as well, which we'll talk about next Sunday. They said to Joshua, we are your servants, which is a bit of a surprising thing if you want to make a covenant and a treaty. And Joshua said to them, who are you, and where do you come from? And they said to him, from a very, 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. And here's another one of their lies. They don't want to say, we heard what happened at the Jordan River. We heard what happened to Jericho. They don't want to say that, but they have heard these things, because if they said that, the people of Israel would know that they lived nearby. So they go back to Egypt. And by the way, this is, some of you might remember a couple of weeks ago, I said that one of the things about the whole book of Joshua is chapter one and chapter two of Joshua are very important. The story of Rahab shows that it's possible for these pagan Canaanites to convert, to cast themselves on the Lord for their mercy, and they would be accepted.

And so Rahab and her family are suggested, and the last time I preached, two Sundays ago, there's these interesting other people now who've also become part of the Jewish people, and they're not Jewish. And it's sort of interesting here, because it's now revealing that somehow or another, the message of what God had done in the book of Exodus was known to the people there.

It's never explained how it was, but this reveals that there's actually some knowledge of what happened in Egypt and the Exodus and the law, what we now call the law or the Pentateuch, is actually known to them. Actually, I'll continue reading at the top of verse 10.

[12:08] And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon, the king of Hezmon, and to Og, the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth.

So our elders, verse 11, and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, we are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us. Now just sort of pause here. There's going to be a long pause to catch up on some of these things and what's going on. So the first thing is, if you read most commentaries on Joshua, or if you read most Bible study guides in the book of Joshua, what's about to happen is what they spend all of their time talking about. Because what's going to happen after this is, you'll get between, we're going to keep reading it like about 12 verses down the road or so, but in the next verses, Joshua and the people of Israel, they look at all the ratty sandals, and they look at all the moldy bread, and they look at the erect wineskins, and I'm sure the people of Gibeah have made sure they're all dusty and don't look like they've washed very much, and they're walking like this, like they're tired from a long walk.

And so most of the sermons, and so the people of Israel do make a covenant with these guys, and then they're going to find out that in fact they only live like 20 kilometers away. They don't live very far away, and they shouldn't have done it. They discover that they've lied and lied and lied and lied, and they showed cunning and deception. And it's going to be that the army now is really mad at Joshua and the leaders, and they want to kill all the Gibeonites, and Joshua's going to say, we can't do it because we've made a covenant with them for the Lord. And so most talks on this are going to emphasize the fact that they made a decision, Joshua and the people of Israel made a decision using their common sense, but no prayer. And that's going to be the main thing that most commentaries will talk about, and most devotional works will talk about that. And it's a good lesson, by the way. It's not, I think, the main point of the whole chapter, but it's a good lesson that we can just go through life and say, yeah, I have this, I have this, oh yeah, I know that, I can figure that out myself. And then we don't actually try to hear what the Bible says, and we don't pray for God's direction. And so it's sort of obvious when people have failed to pray and read the God's Word, when they're doing something which is just manifestly bad, right? Like, you don't have to, you don't have to read the Bible and pray to get the Lord's direction as to whether you should lie and slander, lie and slander somebody, okay? You don't have to pray about that. You should, don't do it, right? But for common sense, and that's normally what the sermons are about, that you always need to be seeking the Lord's will and formed by His Word and praying to Him, and that's a good lesson. But that's not what I think is at the heart of what's going on at this book.

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And what's really going on in this book, and the other thing about it is the Bible is not saying it's all right to show cunning and lie and lie and lie and lie and deceive people. That's not, that's, it's, the Bible's not saying that's a good thing to do. It's definitely not saying anything like that. But what is going on is really something about idols and about God's grace.
and in between that, idols and what is in our heart in terms of how we live and about God's grace and how He sees us. So if you remember, actually, if you have, if, Claire, could you put back up on the screen verse 1? And at the end of verse 1, they say this. Remember, all of the kings, all of the people groups are going to unite in chapter 9, 10, 11, and 12, but mainly 10, 11, and 12, and fight against the Israelites. And they heard of this. That's what causes them to unite. And that's actually one of those little phrases which is really important. You see, here's the basic truth.
[16:03] You and I fight really hard to keep our idols enthroned. You don't believe me? Try having a person who has an idol of money to give away 10% of their money. How easy do you think that would be?

People who have made an idol of their race, how hard will they fight to maintain their racism? People who have made an idol of sex, how hard will they fight to keep their pornography addiction hit?
So what's just happened is, on one hand, there has been a gobsmacking miracle, set of miracles, of the waters of the Jordan River stopping so the people of Israel could cross. And then there was another gobsmacking miracle of the walls of Jericho falling down. And this, you know, as I've said before, it should really cause people to think, why on earth are we worshiping these little puny little wooden idols who can't do that? Obviously, the Lord is the Lord. Like, why is that not happening? Why is that?
That's part of the whole mystery of the book of Joshua, and it's a mystery in the Christian life. Why is it when people hear the fine-tuning argument, why is it then when they hear the argument from design, why is it if they start to understand a little bit about how beauty and love and math and truth point to the existence of God? Why is it that when they hear about the resurrection of Jesus and the remarkable evidence for it, that people's response is to say, no amount of evidence will ever convince me? Like, there's a mystery there. But there's something else which is going on here in this text, because it's not only that all of these people groups have heard of these things.
What happens immediately before this, which is what they hear of, is a covenant renewal ceremony. And if you go back later on and read Deuteronomy chapter 27, and you'll get what Moses said you're to do when you come into the promised land, and you're to renew the covenant. And in that covenant renewal ceremony, what the peoples would have heard is this. The complete, massive, thoroughgoing rejection of every idol and everything connected to an idol-formed life. A complete repudiation of it.
[18:26] A complete repudiation. Every idol is to be dismissed. And if you go back and look at some of the behavior things which are rejected, it means how idols form you to understand sex, how idols form you to understand political power, how idols form you to understand how government should work, how idols work to understand the whole idea of a family structure, and on and on and on and on.

Whether you can own people, like all of that. Every single thing connected to these idols, and the formation of culture, and how you live your daily life is completely rejected.
And now they're worried. Now they're worried. You see, to the pagan mindset, let's say there, if you look at that table where it's set for the Lord's Supper, and in a sense, the pagan mindset, which by the way is increasingly the Canadian mindset.
In fact, secular Canadians are fundamentally pagan in many ways, formed by Christianity. That's a whole other topic of conversation. But in the pagan mindset, you can think of the table containing the idols that you worship. And in a pagan world, you'd want to make sure that there's no spot on the table that doesn't have an idol. And what happens is when they meet another idol, which they hadn't thought of before, which is more powerful, they'll knock one idol off, and they'll add that idol. And so it might very well be that some of them had been wondering up until this thing, you know, they might be saying, well, you know what, the Lord's like a really powerful God. Like, maybe we should add him to our table of idols. And then they might even be thinking, well, maybe we'll knock off, you know, this little idol and this little idol, because maybe the Lord, you know, good grief. I mean, he stopped the waters of the Jordan and he knocked down the walls of Jericho. He's like, he's not like just a little teeny idol. Like, maybe he's an idol almost as big as George, you know. So

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we have to make a bit of space to put George on the table with all the other idols. But all the other idols can stay. And we just add the Lord idol. And then they hear this covenant renewal ceremony. All idols gone. There's going to be a table with not a single idol on it, only the Lord.
[20:37] And human beings will fight very hard to keep their idols enthroned. In 1400 BC and in 2026, urban Ottawa. We will fight very hard to keep our idols enthroned.

And so they decide that they're going to fight. What is an idol? Well, of course, in the ancient world, at the time of this, it's very easy. If I want to make an idol around sex or power or money or myself or the king or my family or my cause, you actually go and you get pay somebody to make something that is aesthetically pleasing or seems to serve that purpose, maybe with a great leer or something angry looking and you just, you get it made. In our day and age, our idols are fundamentally invisible to us.
But what is an idol? An idol is something you can't live without. An idol is something that you serve. An idol is something that gives your life meaning. An idol is what forms your identity. An idol is what forms your telos, like where you're headed in life. It's connected to what is the good life, how you evaluate yourself and others, what defines the good life, what you put your faith and trust in.
And those are what idols are. And the Bible reveals that, in fact, most of the things that we make idols of, not all of them, but many of the things that we make idols of, are good in and of themselves.
But when they become that which forms us and to which we are going to serve, it becomes an idol. There's nothing wrong with money. Nothing wrong with money. The Bible does not say that the people with the most money are the most evil. We are not communists. In fact, you could not possibly be a communist and be a Christian. And amongst other things is whenever communists get in power, they like to kill Christians just to make it so it's not that hard to understand. Although, of course, in the West, that's very hard for many people to understand. And we should be concerned that there's an increasing number of people under 30 who think communism's a good thing. I have a person who's quite woke that we're in a good friendship with despite the fact that I'm a Christian. And one day we were talking and I just said jokingly to her, listen, the way I try to live my life is that when people like you get in power, I'm the first one you want to put against the wall to shoot. Nobody laughed at that.
[23:24] Well, anyway, it's a bit of a... She chuckled at it and knew that I was just joking, but not entirely. But anyway, the thing about modern idols is they stay invisible to you. And they also make you think you can see idols in others. So, I can sure tell the people who have their idols are maybe about how they look or their idols are about money or their idols are about power or their idols are about their political cause or their idols are about their children or their idols are about this or that. I think I can identify them. And my idols say I can help you identify those types of idols. And we never take for a moment to think that that other person that I'm in my mind thinking I can figure out your idols. They're saying that about me. And they're saying that about you. I know what George's idols are.

Because having idols is a human problem. It's not an outsider problem, but a human problem. And the other thing about it, of course, is that we think that if we serve our idols...
No, if we have an idol... So, nobody ever takes an idol to serve, per se. Everybody picks an idol thinking they can use the idol to attain the good life, not realizing that you never use an idol. Idols only use you.
You never use an idol. Idols only use you. So, most of the people, they decide that they're going to fight because their idols are threatened, and the Lord seems to be very serious about it. Gibeonites choose a different response.
Gibeonites. So, what is it about the Gibeonites? Is it just that they're maybe very better at recognizing their idols, and they're sort of somehow more virtuous? Well, we know they're not more virtuous. Why do we know they're not more virtuous? Well, because they lie, and then they lie, and then they lie, and then heck, what the heck? Let's lie again, and then deceive. And so, we know that they're not more virtuous. Well, the end of the story here will help us to understand what else is going on. So, if you skip down to verse 22, we'll read the last little bit of this story of the Gibeonites. And 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? Verse 23, Now therefore you are cursed. We're going to return to what that means. Now therefore you were cursed. And some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. They answered Joshua,

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Because it was told to us your servants for a certainty that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. Now I've skipped some other things that they said earlier, but just anyway, keep moving. And now behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it. Now Moses delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and he didn't allow the people of Israel from killing them. That's a summary of a wooden translation of verse 26. Verse 27, 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 that place that he should choose. So he did that. So what's going on in here? Well, when I was in the Diocese of Ottawa, I was a, from the point of view of the culture of the Diocese of Ottawa, because I was an Orthodox evangelical, I was considered to be a bit of a problematic priest, because I didn't fit in with the culture. And so one of the things that they did, there's several things that they did for problematic priests. The first one, I was just too thick, not holy, but just too thick to notice it. They kept me off of all the committees where I could meet the great poobahs. And I just, I didn't care about the poobahs. And I thought the idea of going to a, sitting around a day-long meeting, talking about nothing, accomplishing nothing with poobahs, was like a punishment. But for many people, they thought it was like a reward. So I didn't notice it. And then it wasn't until later I realized that the second thing they did to punish me, so to speak, was to send me to Eganville, and a very, very rural parish. And once again, it was only later I realized that that was a type of punishment, because the people they liked, they sent their, their, the something close to the city, or like somewhere which was like cool, like, or interesting, like Perth. But to send people far away to a huge parish, which was very rural and lower working class, was a punishment.
[28:28] And they didn't realize that Louise and I were hoping we would go to a place like Eganville. That's why we were too thick to realize they were trying to punish us. But, but here's the thing. For most people, we would rather rule in hell, no matter how tiny hell was, than serve in heaven.

That line, to rule in hell rather than to serve in heaven, comes from Milton's Paradise Lost, a great poem of the 1600s, describing the devil. That you, most human beings would rather rule in hell, even if it's really tiny and shrinking, than to serve the Lord in the vast expanses of beauty and glory of heaven. And if your heart says, I would rather rule in a tiny shrinking corner of hell than serve in heaven. No punishment could be greater than to be told you had to serve the Lord.
But if you have thrown yourself upon the mercy of the Lord, you will view this as on one level a punishment, but as a mercy and a grace.
So this text, in our emotional reaction to the punishment, tells us something about our hearts. Our hearts, not only do our hearts worship idols, but in our hearts, we would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven. And the whole lie that idols and our fallen heart tell us about serving the Lord rather than rule, that we had better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven. There's a bit of a quarter truth there, a quarter truth. And when you have a quarter truth buried, surrounding the deeper lie, we swallow it very easily. Because as I gave up in my earlier examples about having had at some time a boss that just looked at me to get me in trouble, in the final years in the Diocese of Ottawa, I knew that I was being watched very closely because they wanted to get me in trouble. And because of that, we are very leery about serving. But, you know, the fact of the matter is, it's only a quarter truth. We should be worried about serving tyrants.
That's a valid type of fear. We should be worried about serving people that hate us. That's a valid fear. But there is a greater truth. There's this very profound story that is at the heart of the Bible, that God, the Son of God, fully and truly divine, set aside his divine nature and splendor and prerogatives. And in complete love, eternal love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, out of the abundance of the love of the eternal triune God, God, the Son of God, set aside his glory and divine prerogatives and splendors, all of the worship which is properly due to him, he set that all aside but remaining by himself, being truly God in his essential nature, took into himself our human nature and humbled himself to the point of being born, put in the womb of the Virgin Mary and walking amongst us in a lower working class life under an oppressed and captive people. And there's a time shortly before his crucifixion where James and John are arguing about why they should be sitting, they want to be the ones to sit beside Jesus when he comes in his kingdom. They're thinking he's going to come and kill all the Romans and their Jewish people are going to rule and they want to be the ones sitting at Jesus's right hand and left. And the other disciples are

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all upset about that because they'd like to have those positions and they talk to Jesus about it. And then if you go back and look it up in Mark chapter 10 verses 45, Mark 10 45, you can go and look it up. And it said,
[32:40] I did not come to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. I did not come to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. And the word ransom is a slave word. It's delivering a person from slavery. And Jesus saw that we were enslaved to idols. We were enslaved to our appetites. We were enslaved to our fear of death. We were enslaved to demons and evil spirits. And he saw our great slavery and he came and walked amongst us. And on the cross, he, in a sense, a very real sense, a mystical but true sense, a transcendent and eternal yet imminent sense that can be made real in your life, your life, he offered to have you come into him so that he would enter into the slavery that you were already in and he would pay the price so that you could be delivered from slavery into freedom, his freedom and union with him. And that is the new true story.

And so as that story forms us, it forms us to understand on one hand, there are times when that gospel story of God, the son of God, taking on our human nature and dying as us to serve us to die so that we would be delivered from slavery into his freedom. And as that truth gets home to us, our sense of identity in that becomes stronger. And we have a good, proper sense of identity. And it creates within us, when it properly happens, that we do not kowtow to tyrants and to injustice and to evil. But we stand against injustice and tyrants and evil and do not serve them. We choose the firing wall in a communist utopia, which kills tens of millions of people gladly than to join the party.
We stand against tyrants. We stand against tyrants. But we serve children and widows and orphans. We serve truth and goodness and beauty. We serve justice. Husbands are learning to serve their wives and wives are learning to serve their husbands. And parents are learning to serve their children by helping them to walk in the truth. And we learn to serve each other in the church. And we learn to serve our companies for the true thriving of the public good. And the Lord comes and reorders our disordered affections and whole way of seeing the world from the perspective of idols and often idols of class and of race and of the other and of skin color and of language groups. And we're learning to die to these distinctions to serve the Lord, who is the Lord of all, and to be formed in a way to stand against evil and to serve that which is good.
That is how the gospel forms us. So how about the Gibeonites? The main part of the story is the division of that word but. Will we choose to keep our idols enthroned and fight against the good, the true, and the beautiful, and fight against the Lord? Or will we be like the Gibeonites? The fact the matter is, if you want to know who the Gibeonites are, if I had all the true Christians in the room stand, we are the Gibeonites. Our conversion, or our accepting of our conversion, is with mixed motives and impure and bad knowledge. The Gibeonites did something wrong. They lied and deceived.
But their desire to be the Lord's was sincere. And this is how the Lord sees us through the eyes of grace. He doesn't look at George and say, oh, George couldn't have become a Christian in grade 12. Good grief.
[36:56] I mean, he didn't even really want me. He just wanted a feeling. And he didn't really want me. He just wanted to be able to hang around certain people. And he didn't really know anything proper about me. He just had a few little things about me that he liked. And even when I would reveal some things to him about my will, he didn't like that and rejected it. So I'm not going to accept George, because he has too many different issues going on in his life. And it's not, his conversion isn't astute enough. And it's not deep enough. And it's not pure enough. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

That's not how grace looks at you. God left heaven to come and ransom me. And if I had to wait for perfection, I would still not be a Christian. Neither would you. Don't matter how good you are, you wouldn't be either. But how does the Lord see you? He looks and sees George. And he sees George.
And yeah, this is wrong. And this is a half truth. And this is going in the wrong direction. This is all wrong. And he looks and he sees you. And it isn't that he sees something good in you. But he sees some tiny little sliver of true desire for him. And he goes, ah, I will take him for myself.
I will save him. I will ransom him. I will give him a new identity. I will give him a new future.
I will give him my righteousness. And I will take upon myself his sin. I see the sliver of faith in George. The Gibeonites had a sliver of true faith. How do you know? The conquest of Israel would

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take, of the promised land would take about another 10 years. And at no point in time in those 10 years, did the Gibeonites ever join the numerically superior and technologically superior people attacking Israel. And even this punishment is filled with grace. What does Joshua do? He assigns the place where the priests, the ones responsible for teaching people about what it means to be Jewish, in Gibeonites. He assigns, he says the priests are going to live where? In Gibeon.
[39:13] They get an opportunity to spend their years with the priests responsible for teaching the law so they can learn what it means to follow the Lord truly. And is it sincere? It's very sincere. Depending on when you date the book, you move forward to around the year some 500 or something like that in the 500s, early four, late 400s. When they tell the story in the book of Nehemiah about the Israelites coming back to reclaim, I mean, there's been Jewish people there in the promised land that whole time, but they've come back to rebuild the city, to rebuild the temple, to rebuild their culture. If you go back and you read Nehemiah chapter 3 and Nehemiah chapter 7, Gibeonites helped to rebuild the wall.

Over a thousand years later, they lied, but their loyalty was there, and he saves them. Brothers and sisters, you and I are Gibeonites. Amen? Hallelujah. We're Gibeonites.
He takes that tiny sliver of faith and builds us into him. Just two things in closing. You know, here's the thing. One of the things, one of the hymns, I so love this line in a hymn, and maybe it just says a lot about my spiritual life. I love the line of that hymn, when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within. And then it goes on to talk about how we're faultless in Christ. The devil will say, George, look at your Gibeonite. Look at these partial, look at these idols you're struggling with. Look at these imperfections in you. This story says, yes, that's true, Satan. All those things are true. I am a Gibeonite, and I am redeemed by the Lord.
In fact, I'm way worse than you ever accused me of, devil. We can rest in what Christ has done for us on the cross. And it also means that we should be, if this story forms us, and Mark chapter 10, verse 45, how Jesus came not to serve, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. As this story forms us, it should make us more gentle with each other.
Because I struggle with idolatry as well, and we should be gentle with others as they grow in Christ.
Invite you to stand.
[41:52] Bow our heads in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you see us with the eyes of grace. You're not there seeing us just weighing all the things. Father, we know that if we end up rejecting you, we will have to give an account, and no one, apart from Christ, will be able to stand in that final judgment.

Father, our only ability to stand in that final judgment is to cast ourselves upon your mercy, to cast ourselves upon Christ. And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that you don't wait for us to be theologically perfect, to be pure in all of our motives and desires, that you, Father, see us deeply and see that tiniest splinter of true desire for you and your mercy, and you take that and save us. Father, we give you thanks and praise for the wonder of what Christ has done for us, the wonder of your grace, the beauty by which you see us. And we give you thanks and praise that as we are formed by the gospel, who Jesus is in your word, that you begin to reveal to us time and time and time again the idols that we serve. And we ask, Lord, that as we look to Jesus, you will reveal the idols and help us to turn from them, that Jesus will be our all in all.
And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Saviour. Amen. Amen.

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