

Deceivers Saved by Grace

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Date: 28 August 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Well, can we open our Bibles again tonight and look at this intriguing chapter in Joshua chapter 9? Joshua chapter 9, maybe spending maybe about 20 minutes looking at this, Joshua 9, let's read at verse 21.

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.

Now, life is very strange, and the church can be very strange in many ways. There's a movement called Messy Church, and indeed one can ask oneself, what church is not a messy church?

And here we find in the verse that these Gibeonites, they were allowed to live in verse 21, and they actually were brought into the congregation of the people of God.

And that's really quite intriguing, because if you look at verse 3, it says they, on their part, act with a cunning plan. Indeed, the chapter heading is the Gibeonite deception.

[1 : 1 5] So the intriguing question for us tonight is, how did this group of people who began their engagement with the people of God with a deception and with a cunning plan, eventually end up in the very heart of the congregation of God?

So that's the issue we want to explore this evening in Joshua chapter 9. And we see there that one of the great things about the Bible is its realism, because the characters in the Bible are not one-dimensional.

Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, they are flawed people. And you see folk like Noah. Noah was a little bit heavy in the drink on one occasion.

David struggled. We know how he struggled. Mary thought that Jesus was mad. And Peter thought that Jesus spoke words from Satan.

So there's no perfect person in the Bible. And so the Gibeonites here in Joshua 9 certainly fit into the realism of the Bible. So it's a very grubby story, isn't it?

[2 : 2 8] It's a story about how deceitful people were forgiven and, as I said, brought into the center of the church, the congregation of God.

Let me give you the broad picture. Let me explain the story, and we'll apply it very briefly in four ways. You know the story here that the people of God were going out of the bondage of Egypt, and they were to inherit the promised land.

Inheriting the promised land was not simple. It never is. Indeed, the promised land, the land in Canaan, was full of all these other tribes.

You see a list of them. The famous tribes there, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, and the Hivites. And most famous, of course, are the Canaanites. So there were actually 31 different kings to be defeated in a seven-year program.

So we think that Brexit is complicated. Moving into the promised land was complicated. Remember the defeat of 31 kings in seven years.

[3 : 3 4] So it was a very powerful and well-planned project. So by chapter 9, we see Israel's unstoppable war machine.

The Battle of Ai and the best known of all, of course, the Battle of Jericho. Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down.

And so the army of God moved there in a very powerful way, destroying every single king who opposed them. And so you see there that you've got all the pagan kings opposing Joshua and the people of God.

And they were destroyed. Very similar to Psalm 2, isn't it? You know, kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and his anointed.

So you see here the clash that's been going on in the Bible from the very Garden of Eden, where the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent.

[4 : 36] And so we find the same battle through good and evil, God and Satan, the powers of light and darkness, right as a thread through the Bible. Now, the Gibeonites realized that they had no chance.

The Gibeonites realized that they could not fight against Joshua and the people of God and live.

They knew that they would be routed, that they would be annihilated.

They knew that they could not thwart the purposes of God. So they wanted to be reconciled to the people of God to avoid this.

They did the right thing, but they did it in the wrong way. They resorted to this ruse. And so they went into the equivalent of their garages, and they hauled out all the old things to make it look as if they'd come from a long way.

Now, why did they do that? Because in the Bible, we read in Deuteronomy 20 and Deuteronomy 7 and Deuteronomy 20, Deuteronomy 7 says, it said to the people of God, you're not allowed to make a covenant with people who live near you.

[5 : 48] So if we were the people of God here in Point, we would not be allowed to make a covenant with people from, say, Tongue, on the other side of Broad Bay, because they live relatively near here.

But you could make a covenant with the people from Uig, from Mangaster, because it's miles away. And so you see the position under God's law.

You weren't allowed to make a covenant. Folk who live near, in Tongue, but you could make a covenant from folk in Mangaster, right in the edge of Uig, because they were a long way, too far away to be of any harm.

So the Gibeonites, who were from the equivalent of Tongue, pretended that they'd come a long way, that they'd marched from Mangaster, that they'd marched from Uig.

And so that's how they wore these old sandals, dry bread, old wineskins. And so the people of God were taken in by this story, and a peace treaty was made.

[6 : 58] Now, as soon as the peace treaty was made, the people of God said, we have been deceived. And the elders of the people wanted to destroy the Gibeonites.

What can we make of that? What application can we make of that for us living here in Point in 2019?

This very obscure story, what relevance does it have to us in our croft, or in our house, in our shop, in our school? Well, let me apply it in four different ways, using just one word applications.

The first word I'm using is discernment. Discernment. The ability to know what's good and what's bad. The deception wasn't sophisticated.

I mean, anyone could have seen through this. Accents were very different. The accent of the people from near was very different to the accent from people far away.

[8 : 11] You know, if someone comes from Harris, you know their accent. They're not thinking, they're sinking. And that's just the way people speak. Apologies to anyone whose heritage is in Harris.

But there are these little, you know, subtle distinctions. And so they would have known even by their accent that they were from far away. It wasn't a sophisticated ruse.

But remember what the verse says here. It says that they, look at verse 14. This is a key thing. So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord.

They just believed what they heard. They lacked discernment. Now, they didn't pray. They didn't think they thought they would be okay.

And this, normally they prayed over situations. But in this situation, they didn't bother praying. I wonder if we look at that sometimes, that we lack discernment. We lack the ability to know what's right and what's wrong because we simply don't pray.

[9 : 20] We don't put these things before the Lord. We don't ask the Lord. Now, we may say that, well, there's open doors. An open door is not always a right door.

An open door is not always the right door. A few months ago, I was in a hotel in Dallas in Texas.

And if you've ever been in Texas, everything is ridiculously bigger than everywhere else.

And I was staying in this hotel. I don't know how many stories it had. Hundreds. Well, not hundreds. It was very, very tall. And the lift opened.

And I went to go out the door. But there was nothing there. Just an empty lift shaft. An open door can lead to a great fall.

So open doors do not automatically say it's the right door. We need discernment. We need discernment. And so that's the key thing here.

[10:31] They did not pray over the situation. So there's a call for us. We want to be discernment. We want to also be people of prayer. James says, If any one of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

The world is not all that it seems. The spiritual world is not all that it seems. The people on God TV and TV evangelists are not always what they seem.

We need discernment. We need discernment. So that's the first thing. Number one, discernment. Number two here, integrity. Three days after they made the oath, they heard that they were neighbors.

And so verse 17, they set out to kill them. But the leaders, look at verse 18, But the people of Israel did not attack them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord.

So you see there, integrity. The leaders said no. And they were motivated. Look what it says in verse 19. We have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel, and now we may not touch them.

[11:47] This we will not do because of the oath that we swore to them. So the honor of God was greater than their own personal reputation.

Now this is where life is somewhat messy. The oath was wrongly obtained. They told a lie. You know, a lawyer would say, You can get out of that.

The contract is void. You know, it's based in a deceit. But the people of God said, No. Even although we gave our word.

Integrity. Are we often called to give our word? In difficult situations? And also, we see sometimes that it's not according to our preferences.

It's according to the honor of God. The honor of God was more important in this situation than the reputation of the individuals.

[12:56] We make mistakes. Here we see the wisdom of Joshua and his leadership potential. The others wanted to put the Gibeonites out, whereas Joshua wanted to keep the Gibeonites in.

Let's not give the word inclusion away to other groups. The church of Jesus Christ should be, as far as doctrinally possible, inclusive, taking the outsiders in.

So, we've seen already discernment. We see here the idea here of integrity. But thirdly, the third voice here is choice.

The people of Gibeon, why did they resort to this deception? Because they knew that they would face God one day, very soon, in judgment, through his army.

They would lose everything. And so, they fled to God for protection. And they used this ruse. When I read this story, I contrast that to us coming to Christ.

[14:15] We have a choice. We can either fight God or we can run to him. The Gibeonites ran to him. Remember, they did the right thing in the wrong way.

But how different coming to Jesus? We don't need deception. We don't need pretense. I think of the words, the hymn, Boner's hymn, I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad.

I found in him a resting place and he has made me glad. He takes the muddle. He takes the deceit. We don't need to pretend to be something that we're not. That's the mistakes that the Gibeonites made. They pretended to be what they were not, fearing that they would be rejected for what they were.

Whereas, in coming to Jesus, we come as we are. Just as I am without one plea, O Lamb of God, I come to thee.

[15:28] Now, there's a psalm thing here in this verse. The psalm thing is that the other kings, they were in a coalition with all these other kings. They all had the same revelation.

They all knew the same about God and about the people of God. But we see here that it's only the Gibeonites who wanted reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 2.16 The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay. Isn't this a mystery?

The Gibeonites and the kings of the west were exposed to the same revelation. Only the Gibeonites realized we cannot fall into the arms of the living God.

And so, in a church, there's two works going on simultaneously. Some folk are getting harder. Some folk are getting softer.

[16:28] What about us? You see that in twins. You see it in members of a family. both exposed to exactly the same conditions, if you like, spiritual conditions.

And yet, one responds. So, there can be a hardening influence and effect of being exposed to God. Let's just pray that we are not hardened, that we are softened. so, we've seen here various things. We've seen discernment, we've seen integrity, we've seen choice. But then, fourthly, the fourth word I want to pick up here is grace. Is grace.

This was complicated. Would you not agree? You can discuss this among yourselves afterwards. Joshua chapter 9, well, it's complicated.

[17:27] There's no doubt about that. It's complicated. But God is big enough to cope with the complexity. He will have mercy on us.

It's a way of faith. And here we find that the Gibeonites were rank outsiders, and yet they were taken in. That's a theme of Joshua, isn't it?

With Rahab, who was the outsider in Jericho, and Rahab was taken in. That's a great theme of the Old Testament, how the outsider was taken in.

And at the end of the day, they heard of the fame of the Lord their God. Now, the Gibeonites made mistakes. They should not have been involved in the deception.

You'll agree with me there. The Gibeonite deception was wrong, and yet God took them in.

[18:30] The application, of course, is not it's okay to do wrong. Of course, that's not the application. But what we see here is that by God's grace, the Gibeonites were preserved and taken in.

And so, verse 21, they let them live. They became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation. Ultimately, ultimately, they were faithful to God.

Verse 26, it says here, quite interesting language. Verse 26 says, so he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel.

In the original, it says here that Joshua saved them. Now, it's the only reference in the Bible to Joshua saving anyone.

Now, when we read up Joshua, we think of a greater Joshua, don't we? Jesus and Joshua is the same word.

[19:42] We think of the ultimate Joshua and Jesus. So, when we see here the salvation of the Gibeonites, you see here also the salvation of the gospel.

Now, here's an interesting thing. from chapter 9 onwards, every single reference to the Gibeonites is positive. Through the whole of the Old Testament, every time the Gibeonites are mentioned, they are mentioned in a positive light.

Verse 27, they are given daily access to the tabernacle. Chapter 10, God stops the sun to protect them. 2 Samuel 21, God brought a famine to Israel to force them to honor the Gibeonites.

The Ark of the Covenant was stationed at Gibeon. 1 Kings 3, Solomon asked for wisdom at Gibeon. 1 Chronicles 12, 4, one of David's mighty men was a Gibeonite.

So, this is what God does. This is what grace does. curse. The curse is turned into a blessing. And they find themselves in the house of God.

[21:04] The psalmist says, it's better to be a doorkeeper in my father's house than dwell in tents of sin. It could have been written for the Gibeonites.

And so, we see here this wonderful story of God in his grace taking the outsider in. Let me conclude this.

One of the best commentaries ever is Matthew Henry's commentary. It's, you know, some folk kind of look down on it. It's a little bit old school, but it's a great commentary, especially on the Old Testament.

I wrote down Matthew Henry's application here about the Gibeonite deceit. and he says this, let us imitate these Gibeonites and make our peace with God in the rags of humiliation, godly sorrow and mortification, so 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.

[22:21] we don't need to make a pretense. We don't need to feign that we've come from a long way. He takes us as we are, but he does not leave us as we are, and he honors us because of our greater Joshua, Jesus.

thank God for the grace shown to the Gibeonites, thank God for the grace shown to us. Let's bow our heads as we pray.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you.