



Some of us can identify with this kind of scene. Maybe you are a fly-off-the-handle-type. You have said or did something to someone else and it was a pure knee-jerk reaction and it was ugly. You know what you did hurt someone you love deeply. You realize what you have done has caused others to question your character and your reputation. Even more, you realize your action tarnished the reputation of Christ. You didn't think about the consequences. You didn't have time, you were too busy reacting and now there is a price to be paid for doing stupid things.

Maybe there are others of us here who are not wired to fly off the handle and do impulsively stupid things. We think about things first. We analyze things. We stew. We try to apply logic. We review empirical evidence. And even after all that we still end up doing stupid things.

Why? Why does this happen? Because our ability to be wise is flawed. As hard as it is for our egos to accept, our decision-making abilities are broken by sin. We muster all the wisdom we can manufacture into a situation and it still turns out to be a stupid decision leaving consequences in its wake. This reminds me of the old Pogo cartoon, "We have met the enemy and he is us." And we wonder, "Can what I did ever be made right? Can what I did ever be redeemed?"

This morning in Joshua chapters 9 and 10 we are going to see Joshua's continued ventures in faith. We are going to see how important it is to make sure our decisions and actions are driven by God's wisdom and not our own. Because when we don't apply God's wisdom to situations we don't get the right outcomes. Be hopeful. Be encouraged. God can redeem even the worst in us. But thank God that he is patient with us and his mercies are new every morning. Joshua 9-10 will tell us this morning: Trusting in our own wisdom has consequences, but trusting in God brings redemption and victory.

Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—the kings in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Mediterranean Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)—they came together to wage war against Joshua and Israel (Joshua 9:1-2).

What are these things the kings heard about? They heard about the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River on dry ground. They heard about the fall of Jericho. They heard about Ai being destroyed. They heard about the worship in the Shechem Valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. God had given them great victories and blessings. They were riding high. But isn't it true when things are going really well—when we experience success and favor, when people tell you how great you are—that you are

the most vulnerable. I know for me it's after a mountain top that I experience the valley. I have tried to learn to prepare for that.

When we are taking ground for the Lord, making things count for him, the enemy works overtime to figure out a way to oppose and discourage us. So these five kings that ruled their five nation states formed an alliance. They wanted to go on the offensive and drive these Israelite invaders out of the land. But before any battle takes place, Israel has some lessons to learn, some wisdom to be gained. They will learn that their own wisdom is limited by the physical.

However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. They put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the Israelites, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us" (verses 3-6).

The Gibeonites were posing as people from far away who had been on the road so long that their food had rotted and their clothes had worn out. So they arrived at Israel's camp at Gilgal after what was really a short day trip.

The Israelites said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us, so how can we make a treaty with you?" (v. 7).

So Joshua and the Israelites checked them out. It sounds like they looked a little familiar to them but they couldn't be sure. They were allowed according to the law recorded in Exodus 34 to make treaties with tribes that were far away, but they were not allowed to make treaties with tribes in the land they were to possess. Look at the way these clever Gibeonites pivoted.

"We are your servants," they said to Joshua (v. 8).

We are here to serve you, they said. You deserve to be served by us. These Gibeonites somehow understood that to wage war against Israel would be disastrous for them.

But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?" (verses 7-8).

Joshua is skeptical. If Joshua decided they were not to be believed, he could have killed them right there in his camp. Can't we identify with these Gibeonites? They looked like regular folk who didn't want to die; just people and families who were trying to figure out how to keep their wives and children safe. God obviously saw something in them. In fact, as we continue we see something of a confession of faith, or at least an understanding of who God is.

They answered: "Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt.... And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, 'Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; make a treaty with us."' This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey." The Israelites sampled their provisions.... (verses 9, 11-14a).

It's similar to the confession that Rahab made to the spies in chapter 2 when she told them about the rumors of the God of Israel. Notice they only mentioned conquests outside the area to try to show that they were outside the area. They had done their homework, and in their minds they had to deceive to survive. This text in no way justifies lying or deception, but it is an example of God knowing the heart and choosing to save people only because of his mercy and grace.

The Israelites sampled their provisions. I get the sense that Joshua used all his senses. He saw them, he heard them, he touched them, he even tasted their rotten bread and wine from broken skins. He was putting all his wisdom to work. Joshua was forming impressions based on the material world, just what the Gibeonites were hoping for. But the great error is assuming that reality is only the material world. Sure, there are decisions we make that are totally material. I get a hole in my shoe, I don't consult scripture before I go and buy a new pair. I'm talking about the spiritual world. If we rely on the kind of wisdom that tells me I need a new pair of shoes when I am in the spiritual realm, I am outgunned every time. My wisdom is hindered because I cannot see my invisible enemy in the spiritual realm. I cannot see the specific hearts of people by merely looking at the physical impressions.

It's natural to arrive at this point in the story feeling sympathetic toward the Israelites and actually admiring the Gibeonites. But as the text tells us, the Gibeonites deceived and Joshua had erred. So not only is our own wisdom limited by the physical world, it is also limited by something on the inside: our pride.

The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath (verses 14-15).

One of the tenants of trusting God is to never trust our own judgment alone. The issue is simple. The Israelites were guilty of trusting in their own judgment. Joshua trusted his own ability to evaluate the evidence. He took a common sense approach. In Biblical language he walked by sight and not by faith. He was guilty of overconfidence. The same kind of thing was at work before the first battle of Ai when he trusted the spies and did not inquire of God. Even after the great triumphs at Jericho and Ai and the tremendous time of worship at Shechem, Joshua neglected the most important counselor.

We are about to read about an oath they had sworn in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But in swearing this oath, he

actually left the Lord out of the decision-making process for the oath. Joshua and his leaders were about to do something they wanted God to be a part of, without consulting God. The issue distills down to neglecting prayer. Neglecting prayer suggests pride in our own judgment. The spiritual principle at the root of not trusting God is a deeper spiritual problem of pride.

Several years ago I was pastoring a church that was experiencing a lot of growth. I was experiencing success and was getting quite confident. I determined that we needed to make a first-time staffing hire in the history of our church: I wanted our church to hire a worship leader. I attended a congregational meeting where this was on the agenda. At the end of the meeting it came up for discussion. I made the case I thought very well, and then there was discussion. Several in the congregation were unsure of my wisdom. They had questions. They wondered if I had thought it through and really prayed and sought counsel. I had to admit I wasn't prepared to hear that. It had been a long meeting and people were tired and there was just no way we could make that hire. I was very disappointed.

Once I had licked my wounds, I sought counsel from my elders and I decided to write a letter to everyone in the church. I apologized for my presumption and my arrogance. I asked for their forgiveness. As a pastor I was supposed to comfort the flock, not stress them out. Then I preceded to make my case again for the position, and that following Sunday, one who was so against the hire came to me and said, "Dan, all I needed was to see that letter. I'm in on the worship leader." He was saying, I needed to be assured that you had inquired of God and that my heart was in the right place. Seeking the wisdom of God from God's word, through prayer and through the wise counsel of men and women was a valuable lesson for me to learn. I will never forget what God taught me through that.

Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the Lord, the God of Israel (verses 16-18a).

As I am reading this I think, Joshua, here is your out. You were deceived so why would the oath still be valid? Tear it up and attack! But Joshua viewed this oath as not just something between him and the Gibeonites. It was an oath sworn to them by God. It was God's name at stake, God's reputation and character. If they had broken the oath, what would that have said about the God they serve? The message to the world here is that God cares about keeping oaths and is loyal and faithful in relationships. Think about what that message meant to these Gibeonites. I imagine when they were discovered as deceivers and they still received mercy, it would lead to a beautiful work of God in their lives. But in the present, there were consequences because Joshua and the leaders didn't inquire of the Lord.

The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, but all the leaders answered, "We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them

now. This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that God's wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them." They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers in the service of the whole assembly." So the leaders' promise to them was kept. Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, "Why did you deceive us by saying, 'We live a long way from you,' while actually you live near us? You are now under a curse: You will never be released from service as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." They answered Joshua, "Your servants were clearly told how the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you." So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the assembly, to provide for the needs of the altar of the Lord at the place the Lord would choose. And that is what they are to this day (verses 18b-27).

It may have taken them only three days to discover their error. The Israelites seemed innocent of intentional disobedience in this situation, but there was a lifetime of consequences for not inquiring of the Lord. We might be thinking, "Can't a sin or wrong action be forgiven just like that?". Yes, of course, but we may live with the consequences of that wrong action indefinitely.

Although the Gibeonites were protected, another consequence of all of this was that they did fall under a curse. They were sentenced to a continuous life as aliens among them. Wood cutting and fetching water were tasks for slaves. They cut wood and delivered water to serve the worship life of Israel. The idea is that the Gibeonites worked very hard to meet the daily needs of worship. They were not allowed to integrate or assimilate into families.

What ever happened to the Gibeonites? Their service eventually led to a place of honor. When the land was divided at the end of Joshua, the Gibeonites were given one of the cities in the line of Aaron. We read that at least one Gibeonite became one of David's Mighty Men. Ezra writes that they were totally committed to the Lord and his house. Nehemiah says that there were Gibeonites involved in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after the captivity. Besides Rahab and her family, the Gibeonites were the only ones who were saved out of all of Canaan because the land was under judgment.

I think we relate pretty well to the Gibeonites. The Bible tells us, before Christ, we were liars and deceivers and under the judgment and wrath of God. And we heard about the one true God, as they did. At the beginning of our journey with God, we didn't know much about him. Yet God used a small beginning to draw us to his people, so we learned more and more about God. Eventually we became saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And we became fully identified with his Church. If you have not been drawn into the company of God's people, let what you now know of the true God draw you. He has provided a way for you to be saved through Jesus' death and accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. When we come to him we escape judgment. This great story continues in chapter 10.

Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and had become their allies (v. 1).

Zadek could have come in peace like the Gibeonites or face the same judgment as Jericho and Ai. Verses 4-5 tell us what he chose.

"Come up and help me attack Gibeon," he said, "because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites." Then the five kings of the Amorites—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon—joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it.

The king of Jerusalem formed another coalition of five kings and his message was simple: "Come up, help me attack Gibeon!" In the face of attack—when spiritual forces are at work against us, when a battle is about to be waged—the story is telling us to trust in God because he brings redemption and deliverance.

The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: "Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us." So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. The Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you" (verses 6-8).

Do the Lord's words sound familiar? Back in chapter 8 verse 1 God said the same thing to Joshua before their second battle with Ai, the one that led to total victory. The Lord infused confidence in Joshua. Trust in me and I will deliver you victory. And God left no doubt. He not only showed that he had everything to do with the victory, he ran up the score!

After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, so Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah (verses 9-11).

This road down to Beth Horon indicates the Israelites pursued them for a long distance, up to 20 miles. And if that wasn't enough of a sign from God, we see two supernatural acts that reversed the natural laws all for his honor and glory, to further the work of God on earth.

As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites (v. 11).

Remember the Israelites had hiked all night from their camp to Gilgal to Gibeon and then went right into hand-to-hand combat chasing the enemy through a narrow mountain pass. And God provided—I'll call it an act of divine providence—and sent these giant hailstones down on them. The hailstones were like "smart" bombs which could identify and hit the enemy instead of the Israelites.

On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon. So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar (verses 12-13a).

We think the hailstones were incredible, it's nothing compared to the miracle of extending daylight hours so Israel can secure a complete victory over the enemy! If it got dark, the Amorites could have escaped. So Joshua prayed, "Lord, my men can't defeat them if they can't see them. Keep the daylight hours here so we can finish the battle."

The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel! Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal (verses 13b-15).

I have read the major views on what actually happened that day. Did God actually stop the earth on its axis and move heavenly bodies from their normal courses of orbit? My answer is if that is what God wanted to do, he could. God said through Jeremiah in chapter 32:27, "**Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?**" The Lord is fully able to control the natural laws he put in place. In Psalm 74 Asaph says, "**the day and night belongs to the Lord.**" Others say that God performed a miracle to refract the sun's rays and make it look like the sun has stopped. Others say that the language was poetic, because it was recorded in a poetry book called the book of Jashar. The book of Jashar was not a Biblical book but it was full of examples of God's victories. Some don't take the sun and moon standing still as literal miracles, that it just seemed like a miraculous lengthening of a day because God gave them opportunity to have total victory in one day.

All of the commentaries I read, the writers shy away from making strong predictions on what actually happened. The simplest answer to explain any miracle is faith. God has no limits. And God likes to supernaturally work and give us his resources when we trust in his wisdom. In verses 16-19 we read that the five kings fled and hid in a cave. So the Israelites put big rocks in front of the opening to trap the kings and they continued their rear attack on the enemy trying to flee.

So Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely, but a few survivors managed to reach their fortified cities. The whole army then returned safely to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah, and no one uttered a word against the Israelites (verses 20-21).

Notice this? No more grumbling by the Israelite people. After what they had seen God do that day, they were speechless. All attention was on this awesome God that for some reason had chosen to covenant with sinners like them and had delivered them victory just as he promised he would.

Verses 22-26 say that they brought the kings out of the cave and Joshua's generals were commanded to execute them. The generals were to put their feet on the necks of the defeated kings as a sign of victory. It reminds me of when the Apostle Paul picks up the same phrasing, referring to Jesus' ultimate victory over in

1 Corinthians 15:25: "**For He (Jesus) must reign until he has put all His enemies under his feet.**"

To enjoy victory in Christ, we must be willing to crucify the flesh. So the message is, inquire of the Lord... examine your heart... let God's wisdom guide you into a place of forgiveness, of empowering... and of direction. When we trust in God's wisdom we have redemption. When we trust in God's wisdom we can expect the miraculous. When we trust in God we can experience victory. The rest of chapter 10 explains the total victory of what Bible scholars call the southern campaign to defeat seven Canaanite cities in the south. If you read it you will see it was a blitz.

All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel. Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal (verses 42-43).

What is made clear in these final verses of chapter 10 was first, that the Lord gave the victory and second, Joshua did everything God commanded him to do. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.**" When we take this proverb to heart, we remember that when we trust in our own wisdom there are consequences. When we trust in God's wisdom we should leave this battle scene encouraged and with expectations that God will provide a path as we submit to him in obedience.

God's wisdom led Joshua into hard battles so God could be honored. God's wisdom will lead some of us into hard spiritual battles so God can be honored. And that exhortation of Joshua, "Be strong and courageous and do not be afraid" becomes strength to us to stay the course in battle. To love as Jesus loves. To live out the gospel with humility and give grace to others as God has given to me.

Another lesson from Joshua is this: If you inquire of the Lord's wisdom for the battles you face, you can expect God to work. It may not be hailstones on the enemy, but expect God to work in you and through situations supernaturally for his honor and glory.

And finally, I see from Joshua that spiritual battles are not just defending ourselves from attack, but a battle to defend those most vulnerable. I think we all have Gibeonites in our lives that have been placed with us to defend. God will bring "Gibeonites in our lives" into deeper faith as we defend them. Turning our faith outward to help and defend others who cannot defend themselves expands the kingdom of God.

Be encouraged today. God is still working in each of us to make us look more like him. This is the wisdom of God. I want to pray for all of us who are facing tough battles who are fearful, exhausted or confused. May each of us inquire of God, trust in his wisdom, and be strong and courageous for the spiritual battles we are facing.

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