



Some of us can identify with this scene. Maybe you're a fly-off-the-handle-type. You've said or done something to someone and it was a knee-jerk reaction and it was ugly. In the process, you hurt someone you love. You didn't think about the consequences. You didn't have time; you were too busy reacting and now there's a price to pay. Maybe you're not the fly-off-the-handle-type. You're not wired to do impulsively stupid things. You think about things first. You allow your sense of logic to weigh into the situation, but even after all that you stumble and do and say things you regret.

Last week Lynn and I were on vacation. We went on a guided adventure where we started out in a kayak paddling about two miles upstream. Then we got out and hiked up to a waterfall, and then we came back the same way. On the hike up to the waterfall, we were fording a small river. I was behind Lynn and several others in a single file line. I got this idea in my head that I didn't want to get my shoes wet, so instead of following the group I headed towards a few rocks I felt I could step on to stay dry. As soon as I did that, Lynn warned me it was a bad idea because rocks are slippery. I ignored her advice and, sure enough, my foot slipped underneath me and I took a mighty fall, jamming my finger, bruising my hip, losing my prescription sunglasses, and worst of all wounding my fragile ego. I got up and of course acted like I was fine but inside I was regretting my stupidity and pride in thinking I could go my own way.

What I chose to do on the river that day I've done a million times in much more important arenas, like with my kids, my ministry, my marriage and my friendships. Why do I do this? Mostly because I move forward depending entirely on my own resources. You see, our own wisdom is flawed. Our emotions and decision-making abilities are twisted by sin. We muster all the wisdom we can and it still turns out to be a foolish decision with consequences.

Today in Joshua 9 and 10 we're going to see why we so often stumble in our faith journey and what happens when we do. Best of all, we're going to see how God deals with us in the midst of all this. We left off last week at a high point in Israel's conquest of the Land. After Achan's sin the Lord helped Israel conquer the city of Ai, and then all the people sat and listened to God's law being read. The people responded with a promise of devotion, renewing their covenant with God. It was a new beginning.

Determined Opposition

Israel is back on top. But as is so often the case with us, this high point is followed by a great fall. Look at Joshua 9:1-2.

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.

The kings west of the Jordan heard of Israel's victories over the city of Jericho and Ai. Imagine being a Canaanite. This new force of nomads has shown up on your Eastern border and convincingly won a series of battles. Now they're marching toward you. These guys look invincible, like the 2016 Warriors. The kings west of the Jordan figure the only way to beat Israel is to band together. Maybe they're emboldened by the fact that Israel wasn't invincible. They suffered an initial defeat at Ai; they can be beaten. So they muster up a huge fighting force to oppose Israel. It's just another reminder to all of us that we're in a battle. We say that a lot around here, but we need to constantly be reminded of this. We battle the world, the flesh and the devil. This whole story of the Israelites taking the land is a picture of the Christian life in our fallen world where there are no spiritual advances without challenge and conflict. You can't succeed in the Christian life without being prepared for that.

Deception and Disguise

But sometimes the way the enemy comes at us is more subtle than what we see in these first two verses. When verses 1-2 end we expect an immediate attack to ensue, but that doesn't happen until chapter 10. Instead what we see is a far more cunning attempt to cause God's people to stumble.

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).

Gibeon pulls a Kevin Durant and decides if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. They want to make a treaty. To do that they come up with this elaborate ruse, based on a lie. They hope to convince Israel's leaders they're not from the Promised Land, rather they're from a distant land. They promise to be Israel's servants if only Israel will spare them. You wonder if they'd read Deuteronomy 20:15 where God said the Israelites could offer terms of peace to cities *"that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby."* Only the cities in Canaan were to be destroyed. That's why Joshua and his leaders want to make sure of where they come from.

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

"We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?" 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 all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. 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" (verses 7-13).

They aren't sold on Gibeon's worn out sandals and moldy bread, and they ask the right questions. But the Gibeonites are evasive: "We are your servants." Still, Joshua persists and they respond with another lie: "Your servants have come from a very distant country." Then the Gibeonites actually make a profession of faith. They say, "we came because of the fame of the Lord your God." They even use the Hebrew name for God—Yahweh. They talk about the battles the Lord won for his people, which they say is why they packed up their bags and came in order to make a treaty with Israel. So disguise is followed up by flattery and then another lie.

It's important for us to see quite often this is what we face—not a frontal attack but one that slips in from the side door. The apostle Paul once said he was careful that, "*Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes*" (2 Cor. 2:11). The enemy is crafty. He comes disguised as an angel of light. He makes what's wrong look good. He even use God-talk to dupe us into thinking God is in it.

How do you respond to that? Joshua and the leaders of Israel have to make a tough call. What will they do?

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).

It's clear the one thing they should have done but didn't was inquire of the Lord. Literally, the text reads, "But the mouth of Yahweh they did not ask." The mouth of God was ready to offer direction and wisdom, but they didn't ask. By the way, they should have known better. God told them what to do in situations like this. Back in Numbers 27:21 God said when you need wisdom on a decision, "*...stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord.*" So God had given them a way to get the wisdom they needed in tough situations. But here they trust in their own understanding and wisdom. Instead of seeking the Lord they just sample the moldy bread. "It's okay, Lord, we got this."

How often do we do the same thing? I'm not saying you have to ask the Lord when to get a haircut, but beware of an attitude that says, "I've got this. I know what to do." We charge forward based on our own perception of what's right. We don't walk by

faith but by sight. We say to God, "I've got this. I'll deal with this on my own."

Sometimes we compartmentalize. We consult God on certain things but not on the other stuff. Things like treaties. Or, you know, a decision at work, or where to send your kids to school, or whether to date this person, or where to invest your free time, or how to wind down at the end of the day, or how to spend your money. We make decisions without giving a thought, much less a prayer to God. We know Prov. 3:5-6: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*" We know James 1:5, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*" And yet, time and again, we lean on our own understanding and we don't ask.

Listen to the advice of Alan Redpath, "Never, never, **never** trust your own judgment in anything. When common sense says that a course is right, lift your heart to God, for the path of faith and the path of blessing may be in a direction completely opposite to that which you call common sense. When voices tell you action is urgent, something must be done immediately, refer everything to the tribunal of heaven. Then, if you're still in doubt, dare to stand still. If you're called on to act and you have no time to pray, don't act. If you're called on to move in a certain direction and can't wait until you have peace with God about it, don't move. Be strong enough and brave enough to dare to stand and wait on God, for none of them that wait on him shall ever be ashamed. That's the only way to outmatch the devil."

Israel failed to do that, as we so often do. And so they made an oath by the Lord to let the Gibeonites live. It would only be three days before this failure came to roost.

Remorse and Resolution

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. 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 (verses 16-21).

After just three days the Israelites discover the Gibeonites lied to them and live right down the road. They'd been duped. This is the moment of clarity after you blow it when the weight of what you've done hits you. They head towards Gibeon. No doubt some of them felt they should attack Gibeon, but the leaders say, "No way! We made an oath!"

So God's people begin to grumble against their leaders. If you know anything about the OT, you know God's people were world-class grumblers. For years, when raising our kids, we had

a sign up in our house that said, "No Whining!" For 40 years all Israel did was grumble and whine, and here they go again. In one sense they had a legitimate gripe. The treaty shouldn't have been made in the first place. But now that the oath was made, the leaders were right in making good on it. You can't fix one bad decision with another. It would have been so easy for Joshua to say, "We don't have to keep this oath. They lied to us. We made it under false pretenses."

I've heard people justify divorce with the same reasoning: "I never should have married him in the first place. He wasn't totally honest with me. He said he was a believer but now I know he's not. Why should I have to stay married and suffer the rest of my life because he deceived me?" But sometimes we have to live with the consequences of our choices, especially when promises before God have been made. We have to live obediently and faithfully within a less than perfect situation. One of the things to keep in mind is the honor of God is at stake. God is one who faithfully keeps his promises. To turn on the Gibeonites would have communicated that God himself is unreliable.

And the great thing is, when we're obedient, God often makes something good out of a bad decision. Israel's leaders decide to make the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers. Joshua communicates this to them in verses 22-25 and then the writer sums it all up in verses 26-27:

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.

The bad news is they're stuck doing menial labor but the good news is they do it all in the House of the Lord. They'd serve in the Tabernacle where God spoke to his people, and later the Temple. So the Gibeonites are actually given an important role in the worship of Israel. Like Rahab the harlot, they get folded into the Israelite community. They set up the chairs, vacuum the floor, and decorate the stage. It may be grunt work, but it's valuable work to the worship of God. They could say with the psalmist, "*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked*" (Psalm 84:10).

The Lord Fights for His People

In chapter 10 Israel's commitment to this oath is tested. Verses 1-5 tells how the Canaanite king of Jerusalem, Adoni-Zedek, hears about Israel's treaty with Gibeon. He's alarmed at this. Gibeon is a powerful city and so he appeals to the kings of other cities to join together to attack them.

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 (v. 5).

These kings band together and attack Gibeon, hoping to punish them for their betrayal. Gibeon knows they don't stand a chance, so they call on their new allies to come help them.

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" (v. 6).

What will Israel do? This had to be tough for Joshua. He knows he's in this situation because he failed to inquire of God. Now he's being asked to put his own army at risk to defend a lying former enemy against a massive fighting force, all so he can keep an oath he unwisely made. But if Joshua doesn't go, then he breaks his oath made in the Lord's name and sins again. What will he do? Look at verse 7.

So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men.

Joshua immediately gathers the troops and heads for Gibeon. I'm sure he's thinking, "We've given our word in the name of the Lord. We have to come to their rescue." So they march to Gibeon's aide. I wonder, though, how Joshua felt. One of the interesting things about this whole story is God has been silent the whole time. I think Joshua felt he was doing the right thing, but still very aware of the fact they shouldn't be in this situation in the first place. Have you ever felt like that? It's like, "After the stupid choices I've made, will God still fight for me? Is he even with me?" And it is at this moment the Lord finally speaks.

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" (v. 8).

Notice the past tense, "I have given them into your hand," as if to say, the battle is already over. Not one of them will be able to withstand you. Here we catch a glimpse of the character of God. God isn't like your boss, or your friend, or even like you. He's not like the picture in your head of some powerful being just waiting to crush you the next time you make a mistake. The Bible says, "*If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13). You see, in the midst of our unfaithfulness and despite our stumbling, the Lord remains faithful and fights for us. And when the Lord fights for us, there's no force in heaven or on earth that can stand against him.

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. 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 (verses 9-11).

Renewed by God's assurance of his presence, Joshua marches in a strategic, yet grueling, all-night march; twenty miles, much of it uphill, led only by moonlight. This would be a surprise attack. Just because we have reassurance from God doesn't mean we don't use our head and act strategically. God promised victory, but his victory will be achieved through a long march in the night and a surprise attack.

But when the army arrives at Gibeon, exhausted, Israel doesn't have to do a thing. First, God scatters their enemies like a kid who jumps on an anthill. He throws them into confusion and they start running in every different direction. This massive fighting force

who tried to oppose the people of God finally meets the God of the people, and he routs them. Then, as they flee in confusion, the Lord starts throwing hail stones the size of golf balls down. And more of the enemy died from the hailstones than from the entire Israelite army. Then something else miraculous happens.

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. 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! (verses 12-14).

Joshua prays a bold prayer, asking God to make the sun and moon stand still, and the Lord answers that prayer. Scholars debate what actually happened here. It could mean the sun and moon stopped, or slowed down, or that the earth's rotation slowed down. Or it could mean there was some kind of solar eclipse or other celestial phenomenon that prolonged sunlight and aided Israel's army. I'm not sure exactly what happened, but the point is clear: the Lord performed a supernatural, celestial miracle in response to Joshua's prayer in order to help Israel's army.

This battle isn't won by Israel's army, but by the Lord. The Lord fights for his people. And when the Lord fights for his people there's no force in heaven or on earth that can stand against them. But don't miss this: prayer is part of how God fights for us. Prayer is powerful. There are times in each of our lives when we must be bold enough to pray "sun stand still" kinds of prayers! All that's left for Israel is to deal with are kings who dared to fight against them. In verses 16-27 these kings flee into a cave. But their hideout becomes their prison, and their prison becomes their grave. Joshua has the kings brought out and says to his commanders in verses 24b-25:

So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks. Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies you are going to fight."

Then he has them killed and exposes their bodies on five poles until evening. At sunset he took them down and put them back in the cave where the writer says they remained even to the time of his writing the book. By the way, this is good leadership. Joshua is using this as a kind of object lesson to Israel's leaders. He knows there will be many hard battles ahead. He knew his leaders needed visible and dramatic encouragement to persevere. And he reminds them of what God had been saying from the start, "Do not be afraid. Be strong. This, this is what the Lord will do to your enemies." By the power of the Lord Israel defeated these armies completely. Verses 28-43 go on to tell of the specific cities the Lord gave to his people. Joshua and his army, in one campaign, take the entire southern half of the land. In the end one thing is clear:

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel (v. 42).

So what does that mean for us? I asked why we so often stumble in our faith journey and how God deals with us in the midst of all this. We've learned we're in a battle and one of the primary tactics of the enemy is deception. And sometimes we stumble because we lean on our own understanding instead of seeking for God's. But best of all we learn that even though we stumble, the Lord still fights for us. We get a glimpse of God's faithfulness in this story. When God has every right to leave us; when we fail to lean on his understanding and even forget him altogether, he still won't abandon us.

That is great news. Maybe you walked in here today and didn't even want to come because you felt, "How dare I walk into the house of God after what I've done." Maybe there's a besetting sin you continue to succumb to: anger, lust, gossip, pride, hatred. Maybe you're just spiritually lazy and you haven't even opened your Bible or spent more than a fleeting moment in prayer this week. God won't abandon you.

I had a funny thing happen on that hike from the waterfall to the kayak—I found my sunglasses! It was small miracle, but it was like God was saying, "I saw you stumble. I know you made a fool of yourself. But I'm still with you; still fighting for you." I needed that visible encouragement!

And the Lord will win the fight. No one, not one, can stand against the power of the Lord. Yes, we're in a battle. Satan is described as being a lion, prowling around to devour you. We're under attack. We experience it every day. And, on our own, we'll lose this battle. But with the Lord we can't lose. It's like what Paul says at the end of Romans, "**The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet**" (Rom. 16:20). The Lord will crush his enemies before you, like a kid crushes an ant. You may not be a match for Satan, but Satan is no match for the Lord. The Lord will win the fight.

The reason we know that better even than Joshua did is because of Jesus. Jesus is the new and better Joshua. He's the one who leads us against our spiritual enemies. But Jesus didn't fight like Joshua did. Instead of marching an army all night up a hill, Jesus walked alone to the enemy's side. He suffered the punishment of every one of those kings who dared fight against God. Jesus was hung on a pole—cursed. And like these rulers at dusk he was thrown into a cave to rot. But unlike these rulers he's no longer there. He was raised to life.

Yes, you will stumble. Yes, you deserve to hang on that pole. But Christ fought for you and died for you. If Jesus fought for you then, he's still fighting for you now. And he's coming back one day, that great warrior, and with one word he'll destroy every army that stands against him, and put everything under his feet (Rev. 19:11-16).

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