

Sermon Outline

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”: A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

THEY DID NOT ASK COUNSEL FROM THE LORD (JOSHUA 9:3-15)

I. Introduction

II. The Gibeonites Acted with Cunning (Joshua 9:3)

- A. In 9:1, 2, the kings of the land gather against Joshua and the Church of Israel.
- B. But not all the people of the land took this approach.
—The “inhabitants of Gibeon” opted to make peace with Israel.
- C. Who were the Gibeonites?
 - 1. They were people of the Hivites (see 9:7).
 - 2. They were from the enemy.
- D. Yet, the Gibeonites were not about to resign themselves to destruction.
 - 1. They knew that victory belonged to the people of the Lord YHWH.
 - 2. Therefore, they hatched a plan to get into Israel’s favor.
- E. In verses 3-5, we read of what these Gibeonites did:
 - 1. They acted with cunning.
 - 2. They “made ready provisions...”
 - 3. They “took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended...”
 - 4. They wore “worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes.”
 - 5. “...And all their provisions were dry and crumbly.”

***Question for reflection:** (1) How were the inhabitants of Gibeon different from the other nations? (2) Who were the Gibeonites? (3) How did the Gibeonites act “with cunning”?

III. The Gibeonites Go to the Israelite Camp (Joshua 9:6-8)

- A. What was so “cunning” about dressing up in worn-out clothes, and carrying worn-out sacks?
 - 1. Verse 6 shows us where this charade or “cosplay” was going: —“And they went to Joshua...and said to him and to the men of Israel, ‘We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us.’”
 - 2. The Gibeonites told a blatant lie!
 - 3. The Gibeonites lied to get Israel to make peace with them.
- B. The Israelites question the Gibeonites (v 7).
 - 1. “But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, ‘Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?’”
 - 2. Clearly, the Israelites sensed that something was amiss.
- C. The Gibeonites appeal directly to Joshua himself: “They said to Joshua, ‘We are your servants’” (v 8).
- D. But Joshua too had his reservations: “‘Who are you? And where do you come from?’”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was the point of the Gibeonites’ dressing up in worn-out clothes? How did the Gibeonites introduce themselves to Israel in v 6? (2) Was it true that the Gibeonites were “from a distant country”? (3) Why would they lie like this? What did they hope to accomplish with this deception? (4) How did the Israelites first respond to the Gibeonites? (5) How did the Gibeonites appeal to Joshua and how does he respond?

IV. The Gibeonites’ Deceitful Testimony (Joshua 9:9-13)

- A. The Gibeonite testimony goes from verses 9-13.
- B. The testimony is a mixture of truth and deception.
 - 1. Lie: “They said to him, ‘From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God....’” (v 9)
 - 2. (Probable) Truth: “For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites...to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth” (vv 9, 10)
- C. The Gibeonites’ testimony is similar to Rahab’s at some points.
 - 1. Joshua 2:9, 10: “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we

have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction” (2:9, 10).

2. Like Rahab, the Gibeonites cite the Lord’s great accomplishments as reason to make peace with YHWH and Israel.
 3. It’s highly likely that the Gibeonites knew of what the Lord had done and were sincerely trying to make a truce with God and Israel.
- D. Just as Rahab concluded her citation of God’s actions with a request to make peace with the Lord, so do the Gibeonites (v 11).
- E. To further demonstrate their sincerity, the Gibeonites offer food to the Israelites: “Here is our bread.”
- F. But they lie about the condition of the food: “It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and crumbly. These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey.”
- G. The Gibeonites made sure to take worn-out sacks and clothes because they wanted to give Israel the impression that they had journeyed from a far distant land.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) The Gibeonite testimony is a mixture of truths and lies. What were the lies? What were the probable truths? (2) How is the Gibeonite testimony similar to Rahab’s? (3) What were the Gibeonites seeking to achieve by their deceptions?

V. A Study in Deception

- A. Right here, we see a lesson on the nature of deception.
1. When we lie, we project an image of ourselves to others that is essentially not true.
 2. In the case of the Gibeonites, they lied in three ways.
 - a. They used a verbal statement to create a false impression: “a very distant country your servants have come...”

- b. They backed up their lie by deceptive behavior—they put on worn-out clothes, and shoes, and sacks.
 - c. They used another verbal statement to support the false impression: “...these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey” (v 13).
 - 3. Through a combination of false words and deceptive actions, the Gibeonites constructed a false image of themselves that could win Israel’s sympathy.
- B. This is a good place to be reminded of what our Abba Father thinks about lying.
 - 1. Proverbs 6:17: The Lord hates “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.”
 - 2. Proverbs 21:6: “The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.”
 - 3. Revelation 22:15: Outside the Kingdom of God “are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”
 - 4. Lying will get you into hell, because lying is what Satan does (Jn 8:44).
- C. As Christians, you and I are not so sanctified that we are beyond the temptation to lie.
 - 1. We lie by projecting an image of ourselves that is to our advantage, but that is essentially false.
 - 2. We lie by exaggerating our strengths, greatly downplaying our struggles, and sometimes, by pretending that we have no struggles at all.
 - The end result is that we live hypocritical lives.
- D. How do we overcome our natural propensity for lying?
 - 1. First, we must remind ourselves of the destructiveness of lying.
 - a. God hates lying because it is a mark of Satan and his children.
 - b. God also hates lying because lying is a way of *de-*creating his universe.
 - i. By lying, we chip away at the meanings behind the universe.
 - ii. Meaning is important because we react to the world not just by what we actually experience, but by how we *interpret* those experiences.

- Why do some people get angry at God when they fail in their careers?
—Because they *tell* themselves that God doesn't love them.
- Why do some people not believe in God in spite of all the evidences that are available?
—Because they have already *told* themselves that God cannot possibly exist.
- iii. Internal self-talk or interpretation is involved when we try to make sense of our world.
- c. This is also why *verbal abuse* can be so destructive.
 - i. Verbal abuse plants destructive meanings into the minds and hearts of people.
 - ii. Verbal abuse is hardest for small children because they cannot easily counter the lies of adults.
- 2. Second, we must begin to admit the truth about ourselves.
 - a. This is why we confess our sins publicly every Lord's Day: It's to help us become a more honest congregation.
 - b. In God's eyes, under God's perfect Law, everyone stands condemned (Rom 3:10, 11).
- 3. Third, *we must hide ourselves in Jesus Christ*.
 - a. In the end, the greatest motivation for honesty is the truth that we are already loved by God in Jesus Christ.
 - b. Jesus frees us to be honest about our failings precisely because our adoption is not determined by our righteousness, but by his.
—To end lying, we must learn how to find our glory in Jesus alone, not in ourselves or our accomplishments.
- E. The Gibeonites would probably *not* have lied if they knew that they could be spared the judgment of God.
 - 1. But back then, God's judgment on Canaan was already final.
 - 2. So they felt they had to resort to deceit to be spared.
 - 3. Thankfully, in this age of the Gospel, you and I can be honest about who we are.
—We are sinners—and that's why we need Jesus to save us from our sins.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God think about lying? (2) How do we Christians continue to lie? (3) How do we overcome for our

natural propensity for lying? (4) How does lying an attempt to destroy (or de-create) the world around us? (5) How do we grow in our ability to admit our sinfulness? (6) What does it mean to hide ourselves in Jesus Christ?

VI. They Did Not Ask Counsel from the Lord (Joshua 9:14, 15)

- A. The Israelites respond hastily to the Gibeonite deception.
 - 1. “So the men took some of their provisions but did not ask counsel from the LORD.”
 - 2. The fact that the text says the men did not ask the Lord’s counsel implies that Israel’s leaders ought to have known better.
 - a. They ought to have known the proper procedures before making treaties with any foreigner!
 - b. And that would have involved seeking the Lord’s will.
- B. In those days, God spoke directly to his people through various means.
 - 1. Aside from the prophet leaders, there was also the high priest and the urim and the thummim, two objects used by the high priest to discern the will of God (Ex 28:30).
—Numbers 27:21: “And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation.”
 - 2. Apparently, none of these means of discernment were ever employed at this point!
 - 3. Instead, “Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.”
- C. Up to this point, Joshua has been the obedient prophet who speaks God’s Word to his people.
- D. But now, Joshua slips!
 - 1. The man who had been so accustomed to hearing the voice of God now operates in the absence of God’s voice—and takes matters into his own hands.
 - 2. Joshua opened up the Church to potential agents of corruption.

*Questions for reflection: (1) How do the Israelites respond to the Gibeonite deception? (2) The text expressly says that the Israelites “but did not ask counsel from the LORD.” What does this imply about their culpability in the process? (3) What does Joshua’s failure teach us about him?

VII. The Father Wants Dependent Children

Our Abba Father wants us to live our lives in humble consultation with his Word; not taking matters into our own hands; not being wise in our own estimation; but listening and being submissive to his Word in all things.

- A. When we do not listen to the Word of God, we will be easily deceived by the people and influences of the world.
- B. Although we do not have prophets or urim and thummim to guide us, God has given us many other gifts of grace to guide us.
 - 1. God has given us *the Scriptures—the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments*.
 - a. It is in Scripture that God has made his will known to us.
 - b. All the laws, precepts, and principles that we need to live a righteous life are in the sacred Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17).
 - 2. God gives us *the Church* to help us interpret the Bible.
 - a. He gives us teachers and scholars of the Word
 - b. He gives us the creeds/confessions of the Church:
 - The Westminster Standards
 - The Belgic Confession
 - The Heidelberg Catechism
 - The Canons of Dordt
 - The Nicene Creed
 - The Athanasian Creed
 - The Apostles Creed
 - i. The creeds of the Church do *not* teach us how to interpret every single passage in the Bible.
 - ii. By setting out the Bible’s major teachings, the creeds set the boundaries for our

interpretation—they protect us from drawing conclusions that are wrong.

3. God gives us *the Holy Spirit himself*.
 - a. In the end, the one who really helps the Church read and obey the Bible is not a creed but the Holy Spirit himself.
 - b. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to truly help us understand and obey the Bible.
—John 16:13: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...”

C. The question(s):

- Will we live lives of dependence on the Holy Spirit and his Scriptures?
 - Will we live humbly before the Word of God and the Spirit of God in all of life?
 - Will we seek to live every moment of life with ears open to what the Word of God might have to say?
1. With so many ungodly influences circulating in our society, children of God must be open to whatever God has to say.
 2. If we are deceived by the world—if we end up believing that more money will increase our fulfilment, or that worldly success somehow makes us better human beings—then we would only have ourselves to blame if secularism creeps into Church:
—*We did not consult the Lord!*

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What will happen if we do not listen to or consult the Word of God? (2) What gives of grace does God give us to teach us his will? (3) Why is it important to keep the Bible at the center of our thinking? (4) What is the role of creeds in helping us interpret the Bible? (5) What are the major creeds Reformed Christians need to know? Which of these creeds have you read? (6) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us understand Scripture? (7) Will you live a life of dependence on the Holy Spirit and his Scriptures? Will you live humbly before the Word of God and the Spirit of God in all of life? Will you seek to live every moment of life with ears open to what the Word of God would have to say?

VIII. A More Dependent Prophet

- A. Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God will not listen consistently to God.
- B. In Jesus, God has found his one Israelite, his one human being, who is perfectly open to him.
—John 5:19: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”
- C. The good news is that Jesus did not simply obey God to demonstrate what obedience looks like.
 - 1. Jesus obeyed God to make up for our own lack of obedience.
 - 2. Jesus obeyed God to make us acceptable to him.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who is the one perfect listener of God? (2) What does John 5:19 teach us about the nature and consistency of Jesus’ dependence on God? (3) How does Jesus’ perfect obedience to God affect us?