

Joshua 9:3-27

Sermon Discussion Guide

Passage Summary

In Joshua 9, we encounter a remarkable story of deception, failure, and the surprising faithfulness of God. Having heard what the Lord had done for Israel, the Gibeonites feared for their lives. Knowing that God had commanded Israel to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan, they devised an elaborate scheme to convince Joshua and the Israelites that they had traveled from a distant land. Their worn-out clothes, stale bread, and weathered provisions told a convincing story.

And Israel believed them. But tucked into the middle of this account is a revealing statement: "They did not ask counsel from the LORD" (v. 14). Israel relied upon what they could see and understand rather than seeking the wisdom of God. It is a familiar temptation. We often approach decisions with confidence in our own judgment, turning to God only when things begin to unravel. Israel's failure reminds us how easily we can live as though we are self-sufficient, even while professing our dependence upon God.

Once the deception was discovered, Israel faced a difficult dilemma. God had commanded them to drive out the inhabitants of the land, yet they had now sworn an oath to the Gibeonites in his name. Rather than breaking their oath, Israel's leaders determined to honor it. God's people were called to reflect his character before the nations, including his covenant faithfulness. Even amid Israel's disobedience and the Gibeonites' deception, God's purposes were not defeated.

The story ends with an unexpected picture of mercy. The Gibeonites, who had faced certain judgment, were spared and assigned to serve as woodcutters and water drawers for the congregation and the altar of the Lord. Their service was a consequence of their deception, yet it also placed them in remarkable proximity to the worship of God. The very people who feared destruction would now spend their days serving near the place where sacrifices were offered.

This story ultimately points us to Jesus, the true and faithful Deliverer. Like the Gibeonites, we have no claim upon God's mercy. We have sinned, trusted ourselves, and failed to live according to his commands. Yet through Christ's perfect obedience, sacrificial death, and resurrection, God has graciously brought undeserving sinners into his covenant family. Unlike Israel, Jesus never failed to seek or obey his Father's will. And because of his faithfulness, we can rest in the promise that God will never leave or forsake those who belong to him. Joshua 9 reminds us that our hope is not found in our ability to remain faithful to God, but in the faithfulness of the God who has graciously delivered us.

Discussion & Reflection

1. The Gibeonites went to extraordinary lengths to deceive Israel because they feared what was coming. What stands out to you about their response to what they had heard concerning Israel's God? How does their response compare with the ways people today respond when confronted with the reality of God's holiness and judgment?

2. Verse 14 tells us that Israel examined the Gibeonites' provisions but "did not ask counsel from the LORD." Why do you think seeking God's wisdom is often something we neglect, even when we genuinely desire to follow him? What does our prayerlessness sometimes reveal about where we are placing our confidence?

3. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to rely upon your own experience, instincts, or abilities rather than seeking the Lord? How might dependence upon God look different in the ordinary decisions of your week...not simply the major decisions of life?

4. Israel's leaders had good reason to believe the evidence in front of them, yet their judgment was ultimately wrong. How can we distinguish between simply making decisions that seem wise to us and genuinely seeking the wisdom of God?

What role should Scripture, prayer, and the counsel of other believers play in shaping our decisions?

5. Once the deception was discovered, Israel faced a difficult dilemma. They had made a foolish covenant, but they had sworn an oath in the name of the Lord. What does their decision to honor that oath teach us about the importance of faithfulness and integrity? How do you typically respond when keeping your word becomes inconvenient or costly?

6. Throughout Joshua, we repeatedly see God's people failing to obey him perfectly, yet God remains faithful to his promises. How does this encourage you in the midst of your own failures? Are you more prone to excuse your disobedience because you know God is gracious, or to question God's love when you recognize how often you fall short?

7. The Gibeonites were spared despite having no rightful claim to Israel's covenant protection. How does their story help us understand the undeserved nature of God's grace toward us in Christ? Where are you tempted to think of God's favor as something you have earned through your obedience, morality, or religious activity?

8. The Gibeonites were assigned to serve as woodcutters and water drawers for the altar of the Lord. Their lives would now be connected to the worship of the very God whose judgment they feared. What is surprising or beautiful about this outcome?

How does this picture help us appreciate what it means that Christ has not merely spared us from judgment, but brought us near to God?

9. Jesus is the faithful Deliverer who perfectly obeyed his Father where Israel (and all of us) have failed. How does knowing that your standing before God rests upon Christ's righteousness rather than your own change the way you approach God?

What difference should this make when you feel spiritually weak, discouraged, ashamed, or aware of your sin?

Closing Prayer

- **Confess our self-reliance.** Ask God to forgive the ways we make decisions, pursue our desires, and navigate everyday life without seeking his wisdom. Pray for hearts that recognize our dependence upon him.
- **Ask for wisdom and discernment.** Pray that God's Word would shape our thinking, that prayer would become a natural expression of our dependence upon him, and that we would humbly receive godly counsel from others.
- **Thank God for his covenant faithfulness.** Praise him that his promises do not depend upon our perfect obedience. Thank him that even amid our failures, he remains faithful to his character and his purposes.
- **Pray for integrity in our relationships.** Ask God to make us people whose words can be trusted, who keep our commitments, and who reflect his faithfulness in our marriages, families, friendships, workplaces, and church.
- **Thank Jesus for being our faithful Deliverer.** Praise Christ for his perfect obedience, his sacrificial death, and his resurrection. Thank him that we have been rescued from judgment and welcomed into God's family, not because of anything we have done, but because of his grace.
- **Ask for a greater appreciation of our nearness to God.** Just as the Gibeonites were brought near to the altar, thank God that through Christ we have been given something even greater: access to the Father and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Pray for a life transformed by grace.** Ask that our assurance of God's faithfulness would lead not to complacency, but to deeper trust, joyful obedience, humble worship, and greater love for others.