

Well it's that time of year - March Madness. 64 of the best college basketball teams in the nation are slugging it out to see who will be NCAA champion. It is estimated that 70 million Americans will shell out \$9 billion betting on March Madness games this year. One of the biggest challenges in picking winners and losers is predicting the upsets. Sometimes a lower ranked team knocks off a team projected to go deep into the tournament. When that happens, brackets are ruined. This morning, as we come to Joshua 9, the Israelites suffer a stunning upset by a much smaller, less powerful team. As Israel entered the promised land they were proving to be a formidable force. With God as their Coach and Joshua their Captain, they were clearly the number one seed in the tournament. As they prepared to enter the third round of competition they were approached by some men from afar...9:1-13.

You've got to hand it to the Gibeonites - what they lacked in godliness they made up for in craftiness. They knew they were no match for the Israelites so they resorted to sleight of hand. Notice the parallels between the Gibeonites and Rahab. Like the Gibeonites, Rahab was a Canaanite.
Like the Gibeonites, she had confidence God was giving the land to Israel.
Like the Gibeonites, she responded with fear toward Israel...v. 24.
Like the Gibeonites, Rahab acted with cunning to save herself and her family.

The parallels between the story of Rahab and the story of the Gibeonites is not just coincidental. The book of Joshua demonstrates on more than one occasion that God's purpose is to bless all the families of the earth through Israel. God will fulfill His promise to Abraham that ALL people will be blessed. (Genesis 12:3).

"In the cases of both Rahab and the Gibeonites what they had heard was sufficient to convince them. Rahab left the kingdom of the enemies of God for the kingdom of the Jews. In making her decision, she pitted herself against her king and her culture. The Gibeonites did likewise. They broke with the confederacy and came over to the people of God. Further, Rahab's act means that if her old king had found out what she had done he would undoubtedly have killed her. The Gibeonites were actually caught in their defection. The confederacy knew well what they had done. The confederacy, therefore, did in fact come against the Gibeonites to exterminate them." Schaeffer in Boice, p. 103

Unfortunately, the Israelites responded by making an agreement without consulting God...9:14-15. This past week I was checking in with Jeff Fritsche at White Rock Fellowship. I mentioned I was preaching this passage and he laughed. He said that when he was leaving Austin to come and pastor the church we planted, his pastor

asked him to preach one final time. They were in a series on Joshua and Jeff just happened to get this chapter, Joshua 9. The pastor had already assigned titles to all the messages. The title of Jeff's final sermon was, "Making agreements without consulting God." I'm thankful that his message was not prophetic.

The text makes it clear that the guile of the Gibeonites' wasn't the main reason Israel got fooled...9:14. They "did not ask counsel from the Lord." One of the problems with life is that it is so daily! We make hundreds of decisions every day. How many of these should be preceded by consulting God? Before I dress, eat, drive? I think the answer is to consult the Lord daily. At the very least I can begin each day laying my life before the Lord and seeking His guidance. "Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray. O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch." Ps. 5:1-3

Decisions have consequences and bad decisions have bad consequences...9:16-19. (Times are different today. This contract would be unenforceable, *void ab initio* because the Gibeonites misrepresented themselves). In spite of the trickery of the Gibeonites, the people of Israel kept their word. So many times people complicate their lives trying to overcome the consequences of a bad decision by making another bad decision! Israel had made a covenant agreement. They had also made some mistakes. So they honored the agreement they made. Good thing. King Saul later broke the treaty that Joshua had signed and attacked the Gibeonites. Then, in the time of King David, a famine occurred in Israel. When David asked the Lord about the famine, God said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death" (2 Samuel 21:1).

So what do we learn from this? **The careless decisions of clueless men are no match for the caring ways of a loving God.** Our bad decisions cannot derail the plan and purpose of God...9:20-21. Israel's peace treaty with Gibeon should never have taken place. It was a mistake on their part, a mistake they had to live with and make the best of. But the fact of the matter is that a sovereign God over-ruled that mistake and brought blessing out of what was a potentially dangerous situation.

God wants to get you where He wants you to go more than you want to get where He wants you to go. One of the most encouraging messages in the whole Bible is the offer of God's mercy and grace toward us even when we mess up. Aren't you glad that the caring ways of a merciful God overrule the careless ways of clueless men? The events that followed the Gibeonite deception prove God's purpose.

1. God blessed the Gibeonites. As a punishment for their deception, Joshua put them to work by giving them the arduous task of cutting wood and carrying water every day for the altar in the tabernacle...vv. 25-27. "In order to keep the Gibeonites' idolatry from defiling the religion of Israel their work would be carried out in connection with the tabernacle where they would be exposed to the worship of the one true God." BKC

This was no easy job. It was hard work. But the fact of the matter was that these people, who had joined the people of God by deception, by pretending to be what they were not, ultimately derived spiritual blessing as a result of the work they were assigned. They were there at the altar every day. They saw the sacrifices. They observed the true worship of the true God and from the rest of the records of the O.T. it is clear that these people were eventually fully incorporated into the congregation of Israel. Despite their deceitful beginnings they came to know and to serve the Lord. They abandoned their idols and their false gods and became true worshippers of God.

In fact, in later years, the Gibeonites are called "the nethinim" or "the given ones" who were given to the Levitical priests to assist in temple worship. The book of Ezra mentions the nethinim or "temple servants" returning to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. What began as an act of deception and self-preservation resulted in a Gibeonite Great Awakening.

2. God blessed the Israelites. Not only did Israel benefit from the service of the Gibeonites but the treaty with Gibeon resulted in the formation of a political alliance between various other nations within Canaan to wipe out the Gibeonites and ultimately wipe out the Israelites. In their coming together in this way God was going to help Joshua to defeat several enemy nations at once. Under normal circumstances Joshua and Israel would have had to fight each of these nations individually but instead of fighting five city states one by one God was going to give them into Israel's hands in one battle. God actually used Joshua's mistake to accelerate the conquest of Canaan.

There isn't anyone here today who hasn't made a mistake. Maybe you fell for a false promise made to you by a business partner or even a husband or wife. You may have entered into the relationship under false pretenses but you have kept your end of the deal. When you do that you put yourself under the mighty hand of a

sovereign God who will use these imperfect circumstances to fulfill His perfect plan.

All of us are living with the consequences of our sin. "God is not mocked. What a man sows that he shall also reap." The truth is that these consequences may be with us the rest of our lives.

- a child born is born - the result of a bad decision.
- an addiction begins - the result of our rebellious behavior.
- a family is broken - we didn't keep our vows.
- a heart is full of pride - we didn't do any of these things!

I have good news for you today - All of us make mistakes. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All of us live with the debilitating consequences of past decisions. But God, being rich in mercy, can redeem those bad decisions and turn our curses into blessings. The wisdom of God reigns supreme over the foolishness of men. **The caring ways of a compassionate God can overrule the careless ways of clueless men.** God's sovereignty is greater than my stupidity.

But is God compassionate? When we read the OT about all these people who are wiped out it appears that God is harsh and uncaring. You may wonder where God is right now and why He allows you to suffer. If you come to the Bible looking for an angry God who take delight in human suffering there are many places you can go to support your theory. But before you jump to conclusions just remember that sometimes what appears to be harsh treatment is actually a life-saving intervention. When our asthmatic daughter was 3 years old I logged a lot of time in the ER of the local hospital because she was struggling to breathe. I had to hold her legs while the doctor gave her a shot of epinephrine. She wasn't the only one in pain. As she looked up at me with those big brown eyes wide with terror, I knew that from her perspective her father was a traitor, a mean, uncaring daddy who wanted to see her suffer. How do you explain to a 3-year-old that you may be saving her life? In time she would learn that her mom and dad loved her more than their very own lives and would never do anything to knowingly cause her to suffer. There is no question that God's inexplicable tactics all fit into His perfect plan. We may take issue with His methodology but we cannot question His love. "God demonstrated His love toward us in the while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The cross is a blazing example of how God's love turned that which was intended for evil into good. Let's surrender our lives to His purpose this morning.