

Joshua 9; James 1:2-5; Spared by Deceit I. The United Rebellion II. The Deceitful Tactic III. The Assurance of Life

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, one encouraging principle that we find in Scripture is that our God can bring about good even through bad situation. He can draw a straight line with a crooked stick- or He can hit a target with a bent arrow. The fact is, God often overrides the wicked action of man to bring about His good end. Case in point, consider the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Now His trail and execution was anything but good and just- however God does use the wickedness of man to bring about the greatest good! This is a comforting truth! However, this fact is not to excuse the wicked actions of man either! So today we are going to see that God is going to spare the Gibeonites- even though the way in which they secured their deliverance was by way of deceit! This salvation of the Gibeonites will prove a point- it is better to be a doorkeeper in the house of the LORD than to dwell in the tent of the wicked. Instead of throwing in their lot with the wicked nations in v. 1-2; the Gibeonites pursue peace with Israel and their God! Although they do it in the wrong way, the fact is that when our chapter is all said and done, the Gibeonites will be set apart as servants in the house of God! Better to be a doorkeeper in the house of the LORD than to dwell with the wicked as Psalm 84 says. Or to put it another way, the crumbs that fall from the master's table are better than the feasts of the wicked! So without defending their deception, we can see that God is working through this chapter. And where Joshua failed to ask for wisdom from the LORD, we can be thankful that Jesus is the wisdom of God! In our passage, the Gibeonites secure deliverance by way of deceit! It would have been much better if that deliverance had been secured by obedience- the very obedience supplied by our Lord Jesus Christ! The Gibeonites used deceit to avoid death- where Jesus refused to use defeat- rather obeying and submitting all the way to His death on the cross. So this evening we consider this theme: Jesus Christ illustrates the power of God to overrule man's folly and deceit as the Gibeonites are granted mercy.

I. The United Rebellion

In our first point we can see that the Gibeonite deception takes place in the context of united rebellion. Yes, it was bad that the Gibeonites deceived the Israelites- but look at what the other nations were doing! So as we look at v.1-2 we find that the surrounding nations are united in their hostility against Israel. They join forces to fight against Joshua and Israel. We also will find out in Joshua 11:20- that it was the LORD that had hardened the hearts of these nations. So if the Gibeonites were not hardened in their rebellion, then God must be doing something else with them! So the nations listed in these first 2 verses will cover the expanse of area from the Jordan to the East and the Mediterranean Sea to the West. The hill country, the plains and the lowlands, and the coastal area. In other words, all of the land that the LORD had promised to give to Abraham- all those living in the land that was given by way of oath to the descendants of Jacob. Now there are 6 names listed- and you will remember that the number 6 is the number of mankind- or the number of imperfection. These 6 nations are the descendants of Canaan the cursed grandson of Noah. We have the Hittites- who are known for their pluralistic religion and their worship of created things and nature. We have the Amorites- specifically it was the sin of the Amorites that needed to reach a set limit in Gen. 15:16- it was when the Amorites sin had reached its fulfillment that God would pour out His wrath on them. The Amorites were a fierce, warrior people whose leader was said to be over 10 feet tall. We have the Canaanites in general listed- the wicked and idolatrous people who represent all that man can do in rebellion to God. Next, we read of the Perizzites- these people lived by Mt. Carmel and were said to be village dwellers- more nomadic instead of city dwellers. We have the Hivites who worshipped Baal and offered their children in the fires of Molech and were known for their temple prostitution. And finally, we have the people of the Jebusites. There were the original residents of the city of Jericho and often battled against the people of Israel. Now in this unholy alliance, we have the nations of the world coming to war against the LORD and His anointed. It would have been a huge army that would dwarf the Israelites. Kind of what we find in Rev. 20 where a great number of enemies encircle the people of God- seeking to devour the beloved

city of God. Or as we read in Psalm 2- the nations plot and scheme- shaking their fist in the face of God. These 6 people groups against the 1 nation of Israel would be like the forces of NATO surrounding the Island of Malta. There would be a short battle to say the least if we judged by human standards. And as you will remember, the reason that God wanted these Canaanite people removed from the land is so that Israel would not intermarry with them or learn from their idolatry. So this united front of the Canaanite nations against Israel sets the context in which we look at the Gibeonites.

II. The Deceitful Tactic

So why did these Gibeonites decide to try and trick Joshua and the Israelites? Well, consider their options. Either they join the league of nations in v. 2- which will end very poorly for them since they saw Jericho and Ai defeated; or they try and form an alliance with the Israelites. God softened their hearts and filled them with the fear of God and of Joshua. Since they have heard that this land was given on oath to Abraham- and since they knew that Joshua had commanded the Israelites not to enter into a covenant of peace with the Canaanites- their only other option was to trick the Israelites. So they had a choice- be defeated in battle by Israel- or go for the long shot- try to trick Israel into a covenant of peace. So deceit, in their view, was the only way that they might be able to live. They knew better than to engage Israel in battle- because of fear of the LORD had fallen upon them in v. 3. As a reminder, the Gibeonites were a small portion of the Hivite people. And as the leader of 4 cities mentioned in v. 17- they were located only 20 miles due west of where the Israelites were camped. So they decide to use deceit- they were shrewd like a snake. They were cunning as they played a part- they put on a performance. As the city of Ai was deceived by Joshua- now the Gibeonites play their part in deception. They will use what has the appearance of evidence to prove their claim. We are from far away and we have traveled a long time to get here! So they used old, worn out and dried up rations and cloths. They make this point in v. 6 and in v. 13. Look at our rations- look at this wineskin and this bread- see how it is all dried up and cracked. We have worn holes in our shoes from walking so far. Let this be a warning

to us all- man often deceives others by way of hypocrisy! Lies and deceit flow freely from the mouth of one seeking self preservation! Evidence tampering and twisted reasoning is still one of man's favorite tools to sway the jury. I remember a news story from a few years back- there was a poor man who sat on the steps of the courthouse asking for money while wearing rags for cloths- only to climb into his new car as he drove home. Things are not always as they appear! In addition to this deception, they used flattery! They had good things to say about Israel's God- we have heard all that He has done- they say in v. 9-10. Because the name of your God is so great- we have heard of His fame from afar. And added to this, they repeatedly call themselves your servants. We are your servants- they say in v. 8 and v. 11. In other words, they tell Joshua what he wanted to hear- and they show him what he wanted to see! Now to be clear, the deceit of the Gibeonites is not praised. But when we see their motivation- we can understand why they thought this was the only way in which they could be spared. Was it possible that they might be grafted into the family of God as Rahab was? We will never know. But the fact is, they were close neighbors who used deceit to trick Joshua into promising peace. How close were they- well, as I said- they were living about 20 miles away. It would be like a traveling from here to St. John. Its right down the road. But did Joshua ask God for guidance? No, Joshua followed his gut instincts. As we read in v. 14- they did not seek counsel from the LORD. So the deceit of one party is met with the folly of another. Joshua had a high priest on hand for such occasions as this- but he presses on and assumes he knows what to do. This is a very clear teaching moment for us. As we read from James 1, if we lack wisdom, let us ask for it and God will give it! When looking for direction and guidance, do not stand on your own instincts and insights! Don't trust your intuition more than prayer and the Word! People do what they feel is right all the time- without counsel from God! His word is supposed to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. But we just rush in. Rather we should meditate on God's word and seek the wisdom of wise counselors! You may be thinking- I would never do this? Well, how often don't we fall for Satan's tactics? We thought we knew better- but how foolish we are! As I Cor. 10 puts

it, if you think you stand firm, beware lest you fall! If you think you have all the answer, then be careful! We need to keep going back to God in prayer and looking in His word for direction so that we might rightly order our lives in His ways! So Joshua missed an opportunity to test the words of men by calling for the source of truth- he failed by trusting his instincts and the words and he would have to live with the consequences.

III. The Assurance of Life

So Joshua made peace with them and established a covenant- only to find out the truth 3 days later. They had been tricked, but they had given their word of peace. More than just a promise, they had made a covenant with the Gibeonites and ratified it in the Name of the LORD. Although they failed to seek the LORD's guidance, they did declare the name of the LORD in the solemn ceremony in v. 15. This fact helps us understand their hesitation in v. 18- it was not only their own reputation on the line- it was the reputation of the LORD. They had sworn by the Lord, the God of Israel! So how would they respond? Well, they may complain a little but they end up keeping their word. This is instructive in that God's people must be so committed to the truth- dedicated to keeping their promises even when it is not convenient- not wanting to bring dishonor to the name of the LORD- that they are known as truthful and faithful in all things. Or as Psalm 15:4 puts it, they keep their promises and are true to their word even when it hurts! Two wrongs do not make a right- so Israel holds to their word. Now it hurts Joshua and the leaders to keep their word- they are not winning any points with the people- but they still keep their word! They will not attack the Gibeonite- the covenant of peace will hold for the sake of God's name! There are times in our lives when we promise to do something- to give something or to help someone. How dependable is your word? I was trying to think of an example of how this could play out today. Consider this illustration, what if you have promised to help someone move into their new house just to be nice? When called upon to help, you really don't feel like it- you are tempted to come up with some excuse. But you keep your word because you have promised. So Joshua and the leader keep up their

end of the covenant- and the Gibeonites are spared. Now let's not forget how significant this is- there are 4 towns represented in this group- towns that Joshua has a God-given right to take as plunder- but Joshua and the people suffer loss- and yet they keep their word! The end result is that the Gibeonites are spared- even if it was a trick of deceit. But there are consequences given in v. 23. Because the people lied and deceived, their place in Israel would be that of servitude. They would have to cut logs and carry water for the house of God. They would be the doorkeepers in the house of God- the lowest position- but yet their lives would be spared. So, as we have seen before, God uses fallen people doing sinful things to bring about His good end! The good end is that all these people's lives are spared- the Gibeonites end up as servants at the house of the LORD- and the name of the LORD is glorified among the Canaanites! Straight line with a crooked stick! People's lives are spared- even though man used a wicked scheme. As we saw in the introduction, this same principle is applied to the death of Jesus. Wicked men acting with cruel intent- the leaders of Israel are deceitful in their plots! They lie and seek false witnesses- trying to entrap Jesus. So Jesus is condemned- but even then Jesus will not bring dishonor to His Father! No, He came to do the will of His Father- so He submits the Father's will. And it was through this deceit of man that the lives of many are once again saved- turning us into servants in the house of God! Straight line with a crooked stick! The unfathomable wisdom of God put on display!

To conclude, even though God uses wicked men and their schemes for His purposes and glory; that is not an excuse for sin or a reason to justify deceitful behavior. As we saw, Jesus Christ illustrates the power of God to overrule man's folly and deceit as the Gibeonites are granted mercy. Praise God for His mysterious providence- and may we all seek to be truthful and faithful as we keep our promises to the glory of God!