

## Joshua 9-10 – The Gibeonite Deception

I wonder how many of you are late people. Some people can often be late – if you know someone like this, you know what I'm talking about. Sometimes you might even tell them to meet at 715, when really you want 730! I think that it would probably be fair to say, that in some things, Samantha and I are late people. (I checked and she is happy for me to say this)

However, we aren't late for everything, and there are some things that we're never late for! So we haven't missed a flight. We haven't missed a train, as far as I know! But we have been late for meetings/rendezvous/lunch plans etc. Why is that? Why can we be late for some things and not others? Well, it's not complicated – some things are more important to us than others and we make more effort. The consequences of being late for a plane is so high, we planned carefully, and leave earlier etc. When we make an effort – it makes a real difference! Sometimes effort is the key thing! There's that phrase "as long as you given your best, that's all you can do"

And the teaching profession knows this: teachers are encouraged to praise and reward effort and not just achievement, and sometimes *not achievement*. When you reward effort, it encourages people to keep learning, trying, and striving. If you just award achievement – there is a danger you can encourage high achievers to just coast along – and discourage low achievers who think they will never be good enough. One of the biggest disasters is when people won't try! And if that's true in school, then it's also true with God! It's a real *problem* when people just can't be bothered to think about him, to address their questions and to work out what they think about God/ about Jesus. And our Scripture passage today, Joshua chapters 9 and 10? Raises this question of our efforts with God. How seriously do we take him? How seriously we take our faith? Is he the most important thing to us? And do we really put in effort?

What we will see is, surprisingly God's people don't, but some outsiders put in a huge amount of effort, to draw near to God Let's start by focusing on God's people.

### 1) A lack of prayer from God's people

v1 starts "when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things" that is, God drying up the river Jordan for his people to cross over, and the Israelites defeating Jericho and Ai. "They came together to wage war". The kings of these other nations realise the danger. Interestingly though – when under real pressure, when in a bad situation, they don't all react the same way. (Some fight against God) But the Gibeonites, who we will think about in more detail in a second, don't come for war. They have this plan to try and get on the same side as the Israelites – their aim is to make the peace treaty. So they decide to pretend they are foreigners from a faraway and distant land. v4 they resorted to a ruse:

"They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended.<sup>5</sup> They put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and mouldy.<sup>6</sup> 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."

They're pretending to be foreigners! Isn't this great fun? Will think more about them in a moment, but what do Joshua and the people make of all this? Are they persuaded? Does it sound persuasive?

Well, look at v7 "The Israelites said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us, so how can we make a treaty with you?"<sup>8</sup> "We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?"<sup>9</sup> They answered: "Your servants have come from a very distant country because...

So, are they persuaded by what they see? I think it's clear they aren't sure – they certainly suspect something don't they? But... what do they do? v14 is the devastating verse "The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord". And they got it wrong – they were taken in and they made the treaty.

That verse, v14, is by far the most discussed in this chapter, and it's the one which people quickly pick up as the main thrust of the lesson for us. But *why* don't they inquire of the Lord? What is going on? The passage seems to suggest they're flattered – the Gibeonites don't actually answer their question, but in v8+9 they say and then repeat "we are your servants" which no doubt made the Israelites feel very pleased with themselves. They don't *choose* to ignore God. As if someone suggests "I know, let's inquire of the Lord" but they decide not to and reject that. They just don't think of it, God is just not high enough on their agenda/in their priorities or in their thoughts. Their natural reaction seems to be to rely on themselves.

And what a contrast with the Gibeonites:

## 2) Wholehearted pursuit of God from the Gibeonites.

We see the fantastic level of effort these guys put in, but also that they believe in the one true God, and they entrust themselves to him. Just think of all the effort they put into their scheme. I mean, it makes all the difference. Like the difference between getting dressed up and being on time for a first date, rather than turning up late and scruffy. It's the difference between going down to the bank to talk about your mortgage with all the paperwork ready having done all your research, and just turning up for a quick chat. They have loaded themselves up with old food, off wine, they found a whole load of old clothes and they have set out on their journey, with a very clear plan and ready to do what they need to do. These guys were really prepared. Probably it wasn't just a few, but the whole community who went searching for those naff clothes, food, tired donkeys, probably they asked for help and it was a team effort. And the point is not that they were tricky, the point is they were determined and they made a great effort! And if you look down to v24 I want us to see that they actually do have some kind of faith. Obviously we don't see exactly what they believe, but we see clearly that they trust in God. v24 [here are their words] "Your servants were clearly told how the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. <sup>25</sup>We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you." They were told, and they believe in God and his power – they hear that the Israelites won victories, but they don't think it's simply because they are strong, they know it's because the Lord commanded it – and the Lord gave them victory.

So now they have come *towards* the Lord, not to fight, but to commit their lives into his hands. Actually Joshua and people could have killed them at this point. I think that's what the people were asking for, and what they wanted? Yet the Gibeonites say "we are now in your hands, do to us whatever seems good and right" they entrust themselves to God, and what his people think is really right. Of course Joshua protects them because he knows they must honour the promise they have made. The Gibeonites are a fantastic example to us, not because of their deception, but because of their effort. This is wholehearted pursuit of the Lord.

So I wonder, if we think about our own effort with the Lord, do we think we are more like the Israelites here – "you don't bother to pray". If you are faced with a testing situation, do you just muddle through and do things the best you can, on your own? Without praying and looking

towards God? Or are we more likely Gibeonites who when faced with a really testing time, do everything that they can possibly think of, to pursue God and get near to him.

If you're anything like me, and I know that many of you are, you're thinking right now, actually, I think I'm really more like the Israelites – but I want to make an effort – how can I?

And that's the important question

### 3) How can we make more effort with God?

And I suppose in one sense, you ought to think about things in your life right now, that you really do make a big effort with. *Why* do you make the effort with them? Perhaps you might think of children, perhaps you might think of a particular project you're working on – whatever it is, something you find it easy to put a lot of effort in. And I guess for many of those things, it will be because... They mean a lot to us... And for many it will be because they make us feel really good. The way that we make a priority of our faith, the way that we make a priority of God, won't be drastically different to other important things! Actually it can compete with other, very normal, day-to-day priorities. So, just like in other things, it will take a clear decision and choice on our part – to give and commit a good amount of time God. Perhaps we make a resolution or a commitment– like the rules we put in place if we're going on a diet. But when it comes to the importance of the matter, and the fact that it's enjoyable and rewarding, we can learn from the Gibeonites.

So think of the Gibeonites, is this effort *really* important for them? Do they really *have to* pursue God? Well yes! For them it's life-and-death. If they don't get on the Lord's side, they are all going to die. It doesn't get much more important than this! How does that relate to us? Is that the same with us and God? Well actually, yes, Jesus says we too are in a life-and-death situation with God too, not in this life, but one day, every single one of us will either go to heaven or to hell. Jesus says that for those who follow him "he prepares a place for us in heaven, so that one day we can go to be with him and his father" And he also warns: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, [fear God] who can destroy both soul and body in hell"

If you hear that, and believe it, you are certainly more inclined to take things seriously with God! And it's not just about life after death! There is joy now!

Psalms 84 says "Better is one day in your courts [Lord] than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked"

And that seems to be the attitude of the Gibeonites – they aren't massively upset to be made woodcutters and water carriers – which I understand are the least respected jobs of the time, like the litter pickers. No they're just happy to be alive, and to be with God, not against him, close to him. And Jesus offers the same thing to us! He says that the only way to be genuinely satisfied, content, and to find a pleasure that lasts – is to follow him and seek to draw near to him!

And yet actually sometimes we hardly put any effort in, and we don't draw near to him. I guess we don't think it'll make us happy... But that's crazy. Jesus talked about the kingdom of heaven being like treasure in a field – and anyone who had any sense would sell everything else that they had in order to buy the field and get the treasure. If we had any sense we would pour all the effort we could possibly muster into being close to God, honouring him – seeking him – praying to him for help. When anything tricky came up, we ought to 1<sup>st</sup> go to him. We ought to read his word every day, pray to him loads and loads throughout the day. That is, if we had any sense.

And so I really want you to think! I want to pose the question this morning, how much effort do you actually put in to your faith? How much effort do you actually put in with God?

Do you pray? Do you talk to other Christians about faith? (Or just other stuff) do you try and read the Bible on your own? We have a fun afternoon workshop coming up to try and help with that. And particularly, thinking about prayer, we live in an information age where we can just flip on or logon to the Internet and find out answers to our questions in a moment. When a situation arises, do we pray to God and seek his guidance and help? Or like the Israelites do we just get on, and make up our own minds. These are and should be challenging questions to us.

But if you are in danger of feeling guilty, I want to show something really interesting to you.

#### 4) What does God make of it?

What does God make of what the Israelites do? And what does he make of the Gibeonites?

Well, with the Israelites – very interestingly, God does not blame them, or accuse them, or punish them. Nothing. What's going on? Well, the Lord is doing what he often does with his people, and he is patiently bearing with their failings. His people don't think of him and rely on him, but he still loves them! He is still patient and caring towards them, and in *one sense* their relationship with him isn't hindered. Of course it's not all it could be – and I think we see that most clearly with the Gibeonites...

That's what chapter 10 is all about – God is on their side, he protects them and honours them like his own children! You see, in chapter 10, the other five kings and the nations who decided to wage war, hear what happened – and they are furious! So they do wage war – but instead of attacking the Israelites, they actually attack the Gibeonites! What does God do? He commands his people to go and defend and protect them. He tells Joshua in verse eight that he's given him victory, and then (Just like Jericho) God wins the victory himself! There is some kind of huge hailstorm which God brings down on his enemies, and there is the miraculous super-long day! God defends the Gibeonites himself, it's not simply his people! So we know what God thinks of them – he protects them and treats him like his very own people!

So if we were to summarise, what does God make of it all?

His own people don't pray to him, and these foreigners, the Gibeonites seek him with great effort... Well God bears with his own people, and He accepts and protects the Gibeonites.

It's another example, in a book of the Bible where it's very bad news being God's enemy, that people from outside *can become* one of God's people and find themselves treated like his very own children. Just like the Christian faith teaches about people who choose to follow Jesus and live for him.

So I hope this morning will serve as a challenge, and a chance to stop and be reminded that the effort that we put into something really matters – and in terms of our priorities – the Lord really ought to be number one! I hope you will ask, how much effort do I really put in to my faith? And to God? Even things like coming to church, talking to him in prayer, listening to him in the Scriptures. I hope you'll look over the grapevine and commit and come along to some of the things we're running in the next few weeks which are designed to help you in your faith, to deepen and support you in it.

But if you're someone who is quick to feel guilty – please notice that God doesn't reject his people – but he patiently and lovingly bears with them! And as things go on, he teaches them and leads them. But notice also, that those who do seek him with all their hearts, find rewards he brings are simply fantastic!

**Let's pray,**

Father, search our hearts, show us our priorities – and let us know what they are.

Thank you for reminding us Lord that we have a role to play, in seeking you with all our heart soul mind and strength.

Lead us to make resolutions and commitments, and sustain our effort to keep them, that we would please you, and find our joy and satisfaction in you – we ask it through Jesus Christ your son our Lord. Amen