

APRIL 14

Joshua 9:3-10:43

Joshua 9:3-27

This is a great portion of Scripture, not because Joshua & Co. were tricked by the Gibeonites, but because it shows something of the faith the Gibeonites and the understanding that all of the nations in Canaan had of the people of Israel and what God was doing with them.

Vs. 3-15 Now it says the Gibeonites acted with cunning, but there was faith in something that motivated all of this. Not everyone responded like they did.

Notice in vs. 9-10 that they knew of what God had done 40 years earlier in Egypt and believed it. They also mention Og and Sihon, but notice that no mention is made of Jericho or Ai. These guys were pretty clever.

V. 14 This is the only negative thing there is in the Bible against Joshua, and God doesn't make a big deal about it. I'll bet they never failed to ask the Lord again. We've noticed that Joshua had failed to ask God about a couple of things. Learning to ask God in practical matters was something that he was growing in, even in his 80's. He had intense faith in God, as we'll see today, but had areas where he thought he could understand a situation without needing God's guidance. This is true of all of us. I'm sure this lesson is here for us as disciples.

To Joshua's credit, this decision turned out good for Israel and for the Gibeonites. In Nehemiah, there are Gibeonites in Jerusalem helping to rebuild the wall.

Vs. 16-21 Three days later when Israel marched on Gibeon they realized they had been hoodwinked. Notice that Gibeon was the main fortress that protected three other cities.

Notice in v. 18 that when the people of Israel found out what their leaders had done, they were upset. Why? Because they had internalized the message that if one person sinned, the entire nation suffered. They knew they were not to make peace. God took care of this situation for Israel and covered this oversight of the leaders, bringing something good out of it. Later, after Joshua and these leaders are gone, the people will use this incident as precedence to disobey God and form alliances with people in the land. That will be sin, since they are not tricked, and it is what will launch them into the tragedy that is the book of Judges.

Vs. 22-27 The Gibeonites, the people, the leaders, the entire city had amazing faith. Remember that Abraham & Sons © had lived in Canaan for generations long before this; and it is possible, besides the information the Gibeonites had of Egypt, that they also understood something of the history of Abraham and the promise. That's speculation, I know, but it makes you wonder. Somehow they knew of what God had said to Moses in Deuteronomy about bringing all of the inhabitants of the land to judgment. Were there spies in the crowd as Moses preached? They knew what God had said. In 10:2 it says that this was a *great city* with real fighters, yet they had the faith to try to make peace. God rewarded them for this.

Faith is information, trust in that information and obeying that information. This is why these people received God's mercy. All of the other kings in Canaan knew exactly what the Gibeonites knew and chose not to believe or even run. It is the irrationality of sin.

Joshua 10

Vs. 1-5 It is interesting that God used this event with Gibeon to draw all of these kings into the open field for battle. Imagine how long this would have taken going one city at a time. These are basically the kings that held military power in the southern part of Canaan.

Vs. 6-11 Notice that God assured Joshua of victory. And then you see Joshua, the man of faith, building his strategy on God's assurance. This is the balance of hearing God and then using our

passion and creativity in following God. Both God and Joshua get their licks in, during this battle. Joshua drove his tired army by night to a place where the attack would be unexpected. Then God did His thing. First He got some confusion going and then He *threw down large stones*. God made sure Israel knew that He was involved and that they weren't just winning by their own strength. In light of Joshua's request, this must have been a passing, isolated thunderstorm, since the sky was clear enough to see the sun. I can imagine the guys running from Joshua, saying, "Is it me, or does it seem to you that that cloud is following us? Ouch!"

Vs. 12-14 These verses are amazing not only because of what happened, but because of Joshua. How did Joshua know that he could do this? There must be a link between this and what Jesus told the disciples about what would be possible if they had faith as a mustard seed. Inspired by the Spirit, yet as a man fully immersed in this moment with God, Joshua called on the day to stand still. Before we get lost in the physics of the situation, think about the faith that was inspired in Joshua. I think of how Jesus knew to heal one man and yet pass by another. And how Peter and John one day walked past a guy Jesus had walked past many times, and knew it was time to heal him. It makes me think about the harvest and where those intersections of faith and mustard seed occur.

It was a good thing Joshua didn't know a lot about physics or natural law or anything, because if he had, he would never have asked this because it is "impossible." It wasn't that the day slowed down; it was that it stood still; the sun and the moon remaining in the same place means the earth stopped spinning. Apparently God isn't impressed with physics either, because He did it. Just think about what had to happen for the earth to stop moving. Those hours on earth, everywhere on earth, would have been strange hours. God's power is beyond physics. Physics exist for His purposes but are not necessary. He is absolute. He creates. He stops. He resumes. Physics and natural "laws" work because He makes them work, and life can and will exist (someday) without the sun.

It is interesting on this point that Luther tried to teach science with this section and called Copernicus a fool to say that the earth revolved around the sun because Joshua clearly asked that the sun stand still. Obviously God knew what Joshua meant, and in the same way, we still call it "sunrise" and a "sunset," even in scientific journals, even though we know better.

Again, all of these nations knew what the Gibeonites knew. They could have fled; they could have repented and asked God for mercy. The same is true for the people we are sent to reach in the harvest. They need to hear the message, but responding by faith is between them and God.

Luke 16:19-17:10

Luke 16:19-31

Since Jesus was just talking to the Pharisees, this story would have been aimed at them and also would have been good teaching for the disciples.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus falls into a different category than Jesus' parables. The parables are normally faceless, nameless object lessons. They are examples of "that woman" or a "certain man." No names of historical people are ever used. Names of known people throw the meaning of the story into an historical or fictional framework. For example, if Jesus had told the story of the prodigal son, and Abraham had been the father, we would have immediately asked the question of the story being real or being something Jesus just made up using the historical figure. If the story didn't jibe with what we knew was historical, it would open the question of what, in fact, is historical in the Bible. That would be a nasty can of worms. BUT, that didn't happen. When Jesus told a parable, he used no names and didn't use historical figures.

So, what's going on here? The obvious implication is that this is an historical event. Jesus was not only the man, the Spirit indwelt Son of God, but He was also God the Son. He not only had earthly illustrations to draw upon, but as God, having seen the dramas on earth and how they

were concluded when men left the earth, He knew what happened to these people when they finally entered the next life. Jesus, as God the Son, had witnessed every person who had ever lived enter the presence of God. Actually, it is a place of waiting. The waiting was for the time when the justice and righteousness of God would be fulfilled by Jesus living the perfect life and making payment for sin. The question, "Could God really provide salvation for sinners righteously, according to His own rules," was answered in Jesus' sacrifice, payment and resurrection. Until that event, there was a place of waiting, which was divided into two parts: A place of punishment and a place of comfort in the presence of God. If you read the book of Revelation, people being resurrected to judgment and being thrown into the lake of fire (hell) is still future (Revelation 20). The new heavens and new earth (heaven) is also still future (Revelation 21). So for now, even on the spiritual side of life, things are temporary until the final judgments and new creations are finished.

As a real event, this story provides us with real learning about what happens immediately after death, what it looks like and what the awareness of life is like after leaving this part of life. So, for my part, I treat this story as an historical event.

Notice that the two parts have names: *Hades* being the place of punishment and *Abraham's side* being the good place. Why *Abraham's side*? I can only guess that God's redemptive purpose was tied into the promise to Abraham. Though the promise of redemption goes back to the Fall, it is at God's call to Abraham that the plan of redemption is mentioned in detail. The promise to Abraham was the object of faith in God for many generations of Israel's history. Today the object of faith is the gospel of Christ. Anyway, God calls the good place, Abraham's bosom, or *Abraham's side*.

Notice that Abraham knows about the Law of Moses and the prophets. You wonder by that if Abe was able to hear or view some of that history.

Notice that the response of the man in Hades is concern for his brothers. We often feel very uncomfortable talking about Christ and commitment to God when an unbeliever has lost an equally unsaved loved one. I get that, and there should be concern and tact. But in reality, that lost person who has just stepped into reality, and that being the place of punishment, is consumed with begging that someone will go to that other person on this side of life and tell them about Christ. What shocking reality! Not only is heaven cheering us on to share the gospel of Christ, but hell is rooting for us, too, and maybe with more emotion and desperation.

Notice that if a person will not accept the Word, they will not be impressed by miracles. Think about what we've read in Deuteronomy. So much of that was true and inspiring for us as believers. What Moses said there was the essence of following God in faith for any generation of people on this earth. The Pharisees put their hope in Moses, but as Jesus told them in John 5:45-47, *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*

The same goes for miracles. I remember saying, "If God shows me something, then I'll believe." Not so. The preaching of the Word is sufficient and goes to the heart and soul. If people will not believe what God has said, they will not be moved by miracles. We've seen that the miracles of God bringing Israel out of Egypt and the miracles of His daily provision didn't do much for them.

Luke 17:1-4

Jesus was still thinking about the pride of the Pharisees, how they were like the rich man and made faith and acceptance very difficult for the needy, like Lazarus, tax collectors and sinners. These *little ones* are those in need of redemption like the tax collectors and sinners who had been drawing near to Jesus to hear the Word. The word for sin, means "to stumble." I was reading

Romans 14 and 15 this morning, and not making people stumble was a big part of what the Spirit said through Paul. And when you get to the end of Romans, it says in Romans 16:17-18, *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.* The word *obstacles* means a stumbling block.

Jesus was warning the disciples about this problem and Paul was fighting against it in churches.

V. 3 seems to be Jesus warning His disciples not to be like the Pharisees, holding prejudices and grudges that make it hard for people to come to God and find His acceptance. Jesus tells the disciples that they are to forgive and thereby not give people cause to stumble in their steps with or toward God. Notice what Paul says to Timothy and how that sounds like this: 2 Timothy 2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

This gentle spirit, willing to forgive and be patient with the aggressive, sinning and frustrating, was something that Jesus was trying to ingrain in His disciples, and something Paul knew Timothy needed. And, hey, I need it too.

Notice that if the conditions are met, Jesus commands, "*you must forgive him.*" I take it that the rejection of this person would cause the stumbling.

Vs. 5-10 It seems that with this command, Jesus pushed the disciples to realize He was asking something of them that was impossible for them to do emotionally. In fact, it was beyond their faith. So they asked Him for the faith to trust Him in order to do what He commanded.

In this context, where Jesus has just talked about forgiving in a complicated situation, it is interesting that He uses the illustration of a *mulberry tree*. As I understand it, they make a very dense and complicated network of roots. I know from living in Texas, that if you had clay or cast iron sewer piping, and you had a mulberry tree in the yard, the pipes were full of roots.

Jesus is saying that even the tiniest amount of faith would cause, in this image, the tree to rise up and this complicated root system to release and unravel. Of course, if you do this, remember that in cities there is often restricted airspace around international airports so be careful of how high you throw the tree through the air into the sea. Just a helpful suggestion. ☺ So the promise of faith is that the most impossible thing and the most complicated relationships can be overcome with faith.

Vs. 7-10 Now comes the faith itself, and how simple. Faith is increased simply by obeying with gratefulness, without questioning or thought as to what we deserve. We think our service for God is above and beyond the call of duty, but it's not. I struggle with this all the time, but I'm inspired by this example. In light of all that we've been given as disciples, our salvation, the Spirit, and eternity with Christ, our work in the harvest is nothing and we are unworthy servants and have only done what was required of us.

I know that it might be hard to see this, but this actually ends this section of teaching that began with tax collectors and sinners coming to hear Jesus in Luke 15:1. The harvest is important to Jesus and a disciple needs to be able to extend the grace and forgiveness of Christ, not as a conceptual message, but as his living experience and passion in knowing his Lord.

Psalm 83

Vs. 1-8 It's hard to know when this was written. At the destruction of Jerusalem, many of the neighboring nations were happy and were judged by God for their acts during that time. I have

the sense this might have been when the Assyrians were threatening Jerusalem and the surrounding nations were hoping that Judah would be taken captive.

Notice the references to chapters 4-8 in the book of Judges. That period of time was a time when the neighboring nations made frequent "shopping trips" to Israel.

Vs. 9-18 The psalmist cries out to God to save them like He did during the days of the judges.

Notice the crying out. Earlier in the year, most of The Psalms were the "crying out" kind. You might conclude that by the mere frequency of those kinds of psalms, that should be our normal state before God: asking, seeking, and knocking.

V. 18 The desire is that the nations would know the Lord. If this psalm was written regarding the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem, God decimated the Assyrian army. The world was stunned and every nation knew there was a God in Jerusalem.

Proverbs 13:4

What occurs to me reading this is the difference between knowing God's will and doing it. We may need to question what His direction for us is, but we don't need to ask what our sense of interest and energy should be once we know. Diligence is a response of faith and love.