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(Joshua 9)

Intro. While going through life, some people move forward foolishly and some people move forward faithfully.

You are familiar with the story of Titanic, the unsinkable ship. In the movie, they highlight the lack of lifeboats needed for the travelers, which turned out to be a foolish decision. In the scenes you are about to see, we encounter Rose discovering the shortage of lifeboats, followed by a clip shortly after Titanic hit the iceberg (play clip 1:40). Much like the Titanic, Israel made a foolish decision in Joshua 9. They countered that decision with faithfulness, though, and they were blessed. Today, we look at “Moving Forward: In Faithfulness.”

Theme: Faithfulness

Background: Yahweh, the God of Israel, has begun to bring Israel into the land of Canaan through miracles, like the crossing of the Jordan River on dry ground & the walls of Jericho collapsing, and through victory at Jericho and Ai. As this news begins to spread, other city-states band together to fight against Israel, which occurs in chapter 10.

Overview of the Narrative:

- The kings who form an alliance (9:1-2) are from central and southern Canaan—their alliance is like the kings of the earth fighting together against Yahweh and His Christ (cf. Psalm 2) & they do so “in vain”
- Gibeon, some 19 miles from Gilgal, sends a group of men to deceive Israel, hoping to live rather than die. They dressed in worn out clothes & carried old, crumbly bread to give the appearance they had traveled for weeks to get to them.

Illus: We know no women traveled with the group from Gibeon, because of the description of the worn out shoes.

If women were with them, they would have made several stops along the way to buy new shoes!

- While Israel could have moved west & north as they overthrew each city, they always seem to return to Gilgal at the location where they crossed the Jordan River just north of the Dead Sea—maybe they kept their camp there to see the pile of stones as a reminder of God’s hand in stopping the water so they could cross the Jordan on dry land, so they would remember Yahweh was with them in taking the land
- Israel and Joshua questioned the Hivites to see who they were, but the Hivites lied to them

Illus: Former American political leader, Adlai Stevenson said, “A lie is an abomination unto the Lord—and a very present help in trouble”

Illus: We pastors get a lot of requests for help. Sometimes people parade themselves as seekers of the Lord, but they are really sneakers—they make a profession of faith, tell their sad story to break our heart & pick our pocket (adapted from Wiersbe, 108)—there are some genuine needs out there, but wisdom is needed

- Notice how the fame of Yahweh, the God of Israel, the One True God had spread—what He had done to Egypt through the crossing of the Red Sea & to the Amorite kings—other nations had heard the news of how Yahweh fought for Israel & they feared for their lives
- Verse 14 is the climatic point in the story—Israel made a permanent treaty with the men from Gibeon, something always done in the name of the god(s), but Israel failed to inquire of their own God
- God’s Law in Deuteronomy 20:10-15 permitted Israel to make treaties with distant people but not with Canaanites (cf. Deuteronomy 7)
- Once Israel discovers the deception 3 days later, probably traveling or following them home, they want to kill the people of Gibeon—the wilderness motif is turned upside down—the leaders were justified & the congregation was guilty but it’s just the opposite here
- The leaders tell them they have made an oath to Yahweh & must let them live. Joshua serves as a mediator & spares Gibeon from Israel’s desire to kill them, upholding the leaders’ covenant & decision to let them live, but cursing Gibeon as slaves (cf. Canaan’s perpetual serfdom to his brothers, Genesis 9:25)

➤ Lessons to Learn from this Passage of Scripture:

I. Before you covenant with someone else, seek the Lord’s counsel (9:14)

- “covenant”—occurs 3x along with the idea of swearing an oath (4x)—a binding agreement between two or more parties before the gods of the land (in this case, Yahweh)—an “oath” is a conditional self-curse (modern “so help me God” [if I break the oath], Woudstra, 160)

- Clearly we see a negative example here in Scripture. When you seek to apply God’s Word to your life, sometimes we ask the question, “Is there an example for me to follow?” & sometimes we ask, “Is there an error here to avoid?” When we answer those two questions, we come up with this principle
- Israel’s leaders took the scientific approach but not the spiritual approach in dealing with Gibeon’s request—we must heed the truth of Proverbs 3:5-6

Illus: How many of us have made a commitment to someone only to ask the Lord’s blessing later rather than seeking His counsel from the start?

II. Once you covenant with someone, keep your promise (9:19-20)

- Israel could have killed off the Gibeonites & they could have said they were doing as Yahweh commanded them (cf. Deuteronomy 7:2), but they were right to listen to their leaders, including Joshua, who mixed faithfulness to their covenant, mercy in allowing them to live & a measure of judgment for their slavery

Illus: Too many marriages fall apart because of broken promises. I’m not trying to beat someone up for their past, but for your present & future, keep your promise. To help you keep your promise, go to marriage seminars & conferences & take classes & be mentored to strengthen your marriage.

III. Listen to the wisdom of your leaders (9:18-21, 26-27)

- Leaders are in their positions for a reason—in Baptist life, it’s after a vote has been taken. Any leader worth his salt puts a lot of time in praying over the decisions & leadership demands placed upon them. We are thankful for your prayers, too. All that to say leaders have wisdom to share & though they aren’t perfect, God often gives them ways to correct what they’ve done wrong

Illus: A list of witty sayings includes the following: “a dentist’s mistake is pulled out, a lawyer’s mistake is imprisoned, a teacher’s mistake is failed, a printer’s mistake is corrected, a pharmacist’s mistake is buried, a postman’s mistake is forwarded, an electrician’s mistake could be shocking,” but a preacher’s mistake is sin (Wiersbe, 106)

- If you make a mistake, admit it & then make your mistake work for you! (Wiersbe, 111)—work, they did, because when we hear from them again, we see them helping rebuild the temple (Nehemiah 3:7) as they were among the exiles to return from Babylon (7:25)

IV. Keep covenant with & worship of the Lord central (9:23, 26-27)

- Joshua didn’t kill the Gibeonites because of the leaders’ oath to let them live & the seriousness of the oath is emphasized because it was sworn before Yahweh
- Joshua did make them servants/slaves & gave them the tasks of assisting the priests with all the sacrifices (wood to burn & water for cleansing)
- “my God”—probably a reference that Gibeon still had much to learn about Yahweh, about having a personal relationship with Him
- “house of God”—the tabernacle at this time
- “altar of Yahweh, in the place that He should choose”—a reminder how Yahweh is a God on the move & chose places where He wanted Israel to worship Him

Illus: In the Christian faith, Sunday is a sacred day, the Lord’s day & every other day is secular. We offer ministry on Wednesdays to help educate, encourage & inspire, but there’s nothing sacred about Wednesday. What concerns us as church leaders is when families consistently miss most of the opportunities we have to offer, Sundays and Wednesdays & treat church as an elective in their lives, not knowing it is a basic core course for the Christian life.

Conc. The operators of the Titanic were foolish to think it was an unsinkable ship & foolish not to have enough lifeboats on deck (& not fill them when needed). But Jesus also said it is foolish not to count the cost of what it means to commit to follow Him, who gave His life for you. Jesus could have preached a soft message & had many more followers, but He didn’t. In the same vein, I don’t want us to have thousands of people with half-hearted, foolish commitments to Jesus. I’d rather have a few with me “Moving Forward: In Faithfulness.” Can I count on you?