

Live Strong. Facing Life with Faith

Notes/ Week 6/ Joshua 9

Faith and Mercy

Introduction

For several weeks we have studied difficult passages that remind of us of God's holiness and that He takes sin seriously. This week we will see another facet of God's wonderful nature. His mercy.

Two things to remember as we study this week: 1. One aspect of God's character does not minimize or diminish another aspect. 2. God does not respond one way in the Old Testament and another way in the New Testament. Anytime sinful humans have a relationship with Holy God it is always based on His grace and His mercy. Even in the Old Testament.

I. Defining Mercy

The definition of mercy is simple. It means *compassion*. There are several Hebrew words for mercy in the Old Testament. They are translated *kindness*, *compassion*, and *loving kindness*. In the King James Version, there are 261 passages of Scripture containing some form of the word *mercy*. Forty-one books in the Bible contain some form of the word *mercy*. *Psalms* has more references to God's mercy than any other book in the Bible. In all of Scripture, *mercy* is almost always associated with *forgiveness*. Likewise, it is almost always linked to *grace* as well. A few examples (you can do your own word search by using the concordance in the back of your Bible) are: Psalm 136, Psalm 51:1, Psalm 25:5-6, Lamentations 3:19-24, Deuteronomy 4:31.

The New Testament clearly presents mercy as abundantly present in our salvation. Ephesians 2:1-4. Throughout the New Testament, God demonstrates His love toward us in two ways: His grace and His mercy. They are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Grace and mercy are the demonstration of God's love. Forgiveness and redemption are the result of His great love. To expand our understanding of grace and mercy, think of it this way: *Mercy* is God withholding what we indeed deserve (The wages of sin is death, so we deserve death). *Grace* is God giving us what we do not deserve. (Life, forgiveness, salvation)

After we have studied severe passages like Joshua 7, we must never look at the New Testament and think God suddenly became weak or soft on sin. Calvary is evidence not only of God's great love for us but also His great hatred of sin.

Joshua 9 is filled with mercy, even though the actual word *mercy* is not in the passage. Israel, Joshua, and even a crafty enemy called the Gibeonites will be on the receiving end of God's great mercy.

II. Israel's Need for Mercy

A. What Happened?

Last week, Israel suffered defeat because Achan stole items under the ban and Joshua failed to inquire of the Lord before going into battle (Joshua 7). The enemy at Ai initially defeated Israel. In Chapter 8, however, after Joshua dealt with the sin in the camp, Israel won a victory over the city of Ai. This week in Chapter 9, Israel will encounter an enemy of different kind—a crafty enemy.

The Canaanites were afraid. Five Canaanite kings decided to band together to fight Israel hoping for a better chance of survival (Joshua 9:1-2). But the Gibeonites had a different plan. They chose trickery instead of warfare.

Gibeon was a city within Canaan's borders, only 25 miles from Gilgal where Joshua and Israel were camped. There was a cluster of 5 Gibeonite (Hivite) cities in the same area. The Gibeonites sent an envoy to Gilgal. They dressed as if they had traveled for weeks to get to Gilgal. Their shoes and clothes were worn out, their bread and wine were dried up, and their animals were dusty and thirsty. They seriously looked like they had been on a long exhausting journey to get to Joshua. Once there, they asked Joshua and the leaders of Israel to make a covenant with them, ensuring that their lives would be spared. In fact, they were willing to become servants of Israel. Why would they go to such extreme measures?

Deuteronomy 20 is God's Law given to Moses pertaining to warfare. In the Law is a provision (Verse 10-15) for cities OUTSIDE of Canaan. It was permissible for Israel to make peace with a city outside of Canaan if the city was willing to become Israel's servants. Verses 17-18, however are very clear that the Canaanites INSIDE the borders of Canaan had to be utterly destroyed. The Hivites are the list for destruction. It seems the Gibeonites (who are Hivites) knew about this provision and were willing to take a chance at tricking Joshua rather than die by Israel's sword. And it worked.

B. Joshua's Response

1. **Logic used.** In Joshua 9:14-15, Joshua and the leaders examine the evidence—the worn out clothes, the crumbled bread, the patched and dry wine skins. Without praying, Joshua and the leaders make a decision. They chose to make a covenant with the Gibeonites, never knowing they were the Hivite enemy. Joshua's decision was not rebellious against God. It was hasty and short-sighted, but not necessarily sinful. He knew the provision in Deuteronomy 20:10-15 about cities outside of Canaan, and he was indeed following the provision exactly. He just was too quick to make a decision based on logic, never asking the Lord.
2. **A covenant made.** Joshua makes a covenant with the Gibeonites in God's name, based on God's honor, and God's reputation. They swore an oath to the Gibeonites that could not be revoked.
3. **The mistake realized.** After 3 days, the discovery was made that the Gibeonites had tricked Israel. But Joshua could not undo what had been done. There was no do-over or rewind. The spoken oath was binding. So Joshua deals quickly but rightly with the situation. Joshua 9:20-27 tells us Joshua immediately made them servants. The Gibeonites would be hewers of wood and drawers of water. This position of servitude would last as long as any Gibeonite existed. Joshua 9:23 and 27 further tell us the Gibeonites were given to serve the altar of the Lord and the house of the Lord. This is interesting to me. In serving the house of the Lord, the Gibeonites would become familiar with the LORD God of Israel. They would learn of His mercy. In fact, God's mercy covers the entire debacle—for Israel, Joshua and even those crafty Gibeonites.

C. God's Mercy

1. God demonstrated mercy to Israel by giving them the Gibeonites. Throughout Israel's history, the Gibeonites never caused Israel any trouble. No rebellion. No coup. No uprising. In fact, the Gibeonites blessed Israel by being faithful servants in the tabernacle and later the temple of God.
2. God blessed Joshua with a great victory over those five kings who banded together in hopes of defeating Israel. Joshua 10 is an exciting account. The five kings decided to overtake the cities of the Gibeonites in retribution for the Gibeonites' covenant with Israel. The Gibeonites send for Joshua to defend them because they are his servants. Joshua 10:8 says the Lord told Joshua to go and fight to protect the Gibeonites. Furthermore, God promised a great victory. Instead of fighting five kings separately in five different battles, Joshua won a victory over all five Canaanite kings at once. In mercy, God used Joshua's hasty decision to work in favor of Joshua and Israel.

3. The Gibeonites are later called the Nethium or Nithium. It means *given ones*. They were given to assist the priests. Over 800 years later, when the Southern Kingdom of Judah returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, Ezra 2:43-58 and Ezra 8:20 (and Nehemiah 3:26) says more than 500 Nithium returned to Jerusalem with the Israelites. Do you see it? God had preserved the Gibeonite people for over 800 years while all other Canaanite people had been wiped out centuries earlier. Because the Nithium were still faithfully serving after all these years, it can be assumed they had abandoned their Canaanite idols long ago and had become worshippers of God. God in His mercy had not only brought the Gibeonites into Israel's camp, He eventually brought them into His chosen family.

III. Our Need for Mercy

We have received mercy and grace at salvation, but what about everyday mercy in our everyday lives? What can we learn and apply from Joshua 9?

A. Be Alert

1. The Gibeonites were crafty. So is our enemy. While Satan is described as a roaring lion, he can also be a crafty serpent. This world is our enemy and it can deceive us as well. We are told numerous times in Scripture to live alert. Have our spiritual eyes always open to the schemes of the enemy. Ephesians 6:18, Ephesians 5:15, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 2 Thessalonians 5:21-22, 1 Peter 5:8-9.
2. The Gibeonites knew God's Word and used it deceptively. We cannot believe everything that is wrapped in Christian clothing, spouting Christian lingo, or making Christian claims. We must ask for God's wisdom as we evaluate everything by Scripture.
3. The Gibeonites looked legitimate. Certainly God has given us common sense to exercise in certain situations, but common sense cannot have the final say. We need Godly wisdom. Wisdom is the application of (Scriptural) knowledge that only God can give. Proverbs 3:5-6 is a great passage to memorize. *"Trust the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In ALL Your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight."*

B. Be Quick to Confess

Joshua made no excuse and gave no rationalization for his hasty decision. He took responsibility and immediate action. 1 John 1:9 tells us to confess our sin. We must also confess (agree with God) our short-sighted choices that may not necessarily be sinful. We fall on the mercy of God asking Him to cover those choices with His mercy and redeeming grace. We must be quick to admit not only our sins but our faltering decisions. Living alert. Keeping ourselves submitted to Christ. To live this way, protects us from neglect as well as sin. God is not looking for perfection. He is looking for surrender.

C. Be Willing to Receive

Mercy, like grace, is a gift. We cannot earn it. There is no amount of penitence we can do to earn His mercy. Perhaps in some situations we can make restitution to someone for something we have done. But restitution is a response to the mercy we have already received from God. Restitution will not earn us God's mercy because mercy is a gift. Likewise, to need God's forgiveness and mercy, but not receive it, is a very subtle form of pride. To somehow think our ability to sin has superseded God's ability to forgive, is prideful. To wallow in the guilt of the past, never allowing God to heal and forgive is to minimize the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Philippians 3:13, Paul writes, *"Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on."* Paul's past was filled with awful things; persecution of the church, tearing families apart, sending people to prison. But when Paul (Saul) met Christ on the road to Damascus, everything

changed. Paul is not saying in Philippians 3 that he has forgotten the past because he can no longer remember it. He is saying because of Christ, the past no longer has a hold on him. The past is covered by mercy and grace. The past does not dictate the future. Therefore, Paul chooses to receive the forgiveness of Christ and press on, move forward. You and I must do the same. When we have confessed our sin and short-sighted choices, we receive God's mercy and grace. We receive His forgiveness. We simply trust that God keeps His Word, and live like a person who has been forgiven-humble, merciful, and full of grace. Trust and obey=faith.

D. Be Eager to Obey

The love of God (demonstrated through mercy and grace) constrains us to a life of obedience. His love compels us. We do not obey and serve Christ because we are earning His love. We already have it. Now in response, we live surrendered lives.

Mercy does erase the consequences of sin or short-sighted choices, but in mercy, God redeems. *To redeem* means to *buy back and make new*. Grace deals with the sin. Mercy deals with the consequences of sin. Romans 8:28 reminds of God's great love, demonstrated in mercy and grace. "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" This is not a Band-Aid verse, or God's "fix it" verse. This promise is only for believers in Christ. It is a promise of mercy and grace. All things work together for good, but we do not get to define *good*. Only God does. God's definition of good will always honor Christ and bring God glory. Personally, I am so thankful for God's redeeming mercy and grace. Mercifully, He has covered not only my sinful choices, but my short-sighted, negligent choices, often made in seasons of stress, sickness, or grief. His lovingkindness compels me, it constrains me to trust Him more and obey Him more—surrendered daily to Christ alone.