**Trick and Treaty**

**Joshua 9:1-27 (ESV)**

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***1*** *As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard of this,* ***2*** *they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.*

***3*** *But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to
Jericho and to Ai,* ***4*** *they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended,* ***5*** *with worn-out patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly.* ***6*** *And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, “We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us.”* ***7*** *But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, “Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?”* ***8*** *They said to Joshua, “We are your servants.” And Joshua said to them, “Who are you? And where do you come from?”* ***9*** *They said to him, “From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt,* ***10*** *and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth.* ***11*** *So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, ‘Take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, “We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us.”’* ***12*** *Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and crumbly.* ***13*** *These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey.”* ***14*** *So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD.* ***15*** *And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.*

***16*** *At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors and that they lived among them.* ***17*** *And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim.* ***18*** *But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregations had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders.* ***19*** *But all the leaders said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them.* ***20*** *This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them.”* ***21*** *And the leaders said to them, “Let them live.” So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them.*

***22*** *Joshua summoned them, and he said to them, “Why did you deceive us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ when you dwell among us?* ***23*** *Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.”* ***24*** *They answered Joshua, “Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you—so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing.* ***25*** *And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it.”* ***26*** *So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them.* ***27*** *But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place that he should choose.*

There is a guy by the name of George Adam Smith who was climbing the famous Weisshorn Mountain in the Swiss Alps. He and his guide were making slow progress on this day. It was a very stormy day. They climbed on the side of the mountain that was sheltered from these strong winds. They knew it was dangerous to climb on the other side. But as Smith approached the summit, he felt a rush of excitement and enthusiasm. He quickly leapt up from the last step from that other secured side of the mountain. He was planning to place his hands in the air and stand erect at the very apex of the summit. When all of a sudden, he felt strong hands grab him by the back and pull him down. It was his guide. He knew why his guide did it, because he had already felt the gust of winds almost picking him up like a kite and carrying him all the way to his death down the mountain. He recognized that if the guide hadn’t have grabbed him at that moment, he surely would have been blown off the mountain and died. As the guide held him pinned to the ground at the top of the summit, He said, “On your knees, sir, on your knees. You are safe here only on your knees!”

Like George Smith, we are called to climb mountains in our obedience to God. It’s a difficult trek. As we ascend to a life that is transformed by God’s grace, a life that brings glory to Jesus, we are hit with storms and strong winds of trial and pounding rains of hardship. That’s the course of the life of the Christian. The Christian life is not safe! Winds of physical illness, financial ruin, emotional crises, relational distress, spiritual attack, all of these are a central part of God’s plan for His children. And as these various trials beat against us, we need to hear our Guide’s counsel, “On your knees, sir, on your knees. You are safe here in this world only on your knees!” Remarkably, we so quickly forget that humble prayer is our constant need. A cross wind may blow at any moment and if we are not upon our knees when it smashes against us, we will tumble down the mountain to severe injury or worse. So here we have this story in Joshua 9 that calls out to us, “On your knees sir, on your knees. You are safe here only on your knees!”

When I was a young man, there was a rapper, he was an early rapper by the name of M.C. Hammer. M.C. Hammer became a believer and his rap music changed. I remember one of the first songs he came out with after that was a song that says, “You gotta pray. You gotta pray to make it today.” And that’s Joshua 9. Beloved, you’ve gotta pray. You’ve gotta pray in order to make it today. So we want to ask the question, why? Why do we need to pray? Until we’re convinced of this, I’m sure we will not change our life habits. We want to follow the story and consider four key reasons why we have gotta pray just to make it today.

In Joshua 8, God gave the people an amazing victory at Ai. The people are ecstatic. The victory was particularly sweet because it came on the heels of a defeat by the warriors of Ai. Remember, they had lost favor with God because of Achan’s sin and they suffered a terrible defeat where thirty-six of them were slain in battle. And so now that they’ve defeated Ai, they’re riding this emotional high. Imagine them at this moment. God is good! Joshua in 8:30-35 tells us how they stopped to worship God.

The first thing Joshua did after the victory at Ai was to take the people on a spiritual pilgrimage. Now this is not easy. Remember, there are two to three million people that he has to take with him wherever he travels. They moved from their camp at Gilgal up north about 30 miles. There are two to three million people of men, women and children all traveling together for 30 miles, on their feet. It’s not an easy chore. They travel to a place between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The pilgrimage reminds us that God must always be first in our plans. That’s what Joshua is doing. He said, “We can’t just go on to the next city for conquest. We have to stop and remember who gave us the victory and who is with us and how He is of supreme importance in our hearts and in our plans. Joshua was a great leader to remind the people of that.

Secondly, when they get to that place, Joshua builds an altar to the LORD and they offer sacrifices to God on it. The altar and the sacrifices remind us that we can only approach God on the basis of mercy. That’s a really important principle and truth to remember, especially after a victory. After a victory, we say, “We must be the favored ones. We can come to God in any way.” No, it is always on the basis of God’s mercy. Every time we pray, there is only one reason why God accepts our prayer, even the simplest of prayers. And that’s because of Jesus dying on the cross and shedding His blood. If Jesus didn’t do that, there is not one prayer that would ascend any further than our voice. We would be shut out from the presence of God. That is true not just when we begin the Christian life. It continues to be true every moment of every day that we live. And we are right to remind ourselves that we approach God only on the basis of mercy. The sacrifice that Joshua made on that day looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God who would provide forgiveness of sins.

Then what else did he do after he built the altar and made sacrifices? He took some stones out. I don’t know what writing utensil he had, but he began to write on those stones. Think of this. Here is the leader, coming off victory, and what does he do? He sits down in a corner and he begins to write on stones. What does he write? Everything that Moses commanded. That takes a long time. That’s a lot of work. But Joshua writes another copy of God’s Word on stones. And then after writing out another copy of God’s Word on stones, what does he do? He says, “Y’all sit down because I’m going to read you something. Get comfortable, because it’s not a short little paragraph.

Think about this for a moment. Where are Joshua and the people? This is kind of encouraging to us. They’re outside. Now, they’re not in lawn chairs, but they’re outside. They’re all sitting down, two to three million of them. Who is included? It’s not just the warriors. There are men, women and children. I love that! God wants us to know that it’s not just the men, the warriors, who need to hear the Word of God; it’s the whole family. It is the little ones as well. The public reading of God’s Law reminds us that we need to meditate upon God’s revelation of Himself, upon the will of God that has been directly and clearly stated for us so that we would obey Him and that we would obey Him together. This was not just everybody getting in a corner and reading God’s Word. This was listening to God’s Word together so that together the people would obey God.

As an aside, because I know there are some things about our times that are hard…but hard is good. Count it all joy my brothers when you encounter various trials. (James 1:2) Why? Because God has a design for them. This is not just happenstance. This is not, “Oh man, this is a bummer. Something happened.” Whatever trials we experience, whether it’s a pandemic and whether it’s disruption of the normal flow of church life, or whatever it is, sickness, whatever it is, it is designed by God to help us become more like Jesus. It’s always right whenever we encounter a trial to ask ourselves a couple questions. Am I counting it all joy? And secondly, is this trial helping me become more like Jesus? Then evaluate our responses to the trial on the basis of, is this helping me to become more like Jesus? Am I having more patience, more endurance, more lovingkindness, more obedience to God as a result of the trial?

In this service, again, the children were there. I love that because I want to encourage parents today who brought their children or parents who are considering coming to a service where it’s not the best learning environment for children. I understand that. And I understand it’s right for churches to work on that. Pray for us as we do that. But the children were there. Let me ask you, do you think every child understood and got everything that Joshua said that day as he read the law? Do you think every child at the end could have aced a test on that? No, they couldn’t have. But they were there and they were listening, and I think they got something. That was important to God and it was important to Joshua that even if our children only get one little drop out of a big gallon bucket, that’s a drop that God can use to bring about amazing things in the heart of a little one. So here they were. Parents, you can imagine they weren’t any different than us. Do you think it was easy for them to keep track of their kids in a big group like that outside as Joshua read the law? No, it was hard. And yet, these parents were saying, “It’s right for us to be here together to listen to God’s Word.”

So now the people at the end of this, this has been a big rally. They’ve taken the 30 mile trek. They had all this great sort of rallying around God and hearing His voice. This has charged them up. They’re ready to move forward with the rest of the conquest of the land. The enemies who live around them are really, really frightened. They have seen and heard about the awesome power of Yahweh. They heard about what He did to the Egyptians. They heard about what He did to the kings east of the Jordan River. They heard about what He did in Jericho. They heard about what happened in Ai. And so Joshua 9 opens up with these kings saying, “We’ve got to stop fighting each other because we have an enemy who we know is planning to take over all of our land.” So they meet together; the Hittites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. They’re historically all enemies, but they’re bound together now, declaring a truce in order to fight against Joshua.

And then there are some people of the hill country called the Gibeonites. Gibeon was the main city. There were some other little cities surrounding it. And they also knew that they didn’t stand a chance against the Israelites and especially against the Israelites’ God. They knew that Yahweh had promised them all the land and had told the people to kill all the people in the land. So they were fearing for their lives. They were only some 16 to 20 miles away from where the Israelites are camping in Gilgal. They feel like they could be the next city. So they devised a plan to secure their lives. What did they do? Well the story is so fascinating. They took some worn out sacks, they found the most musty, worn out sacks they could possibly find and filled them half full with bread. But it can’t be bread baked fresh out of the oven. It’s bread that had become moldy, the kind of stuff we feed to the animals. And then they loaded the sacks with this bread. Then they took some wineskins that were cracked and broken and they said, “Let’s carry the cracked and broken wineskins because they’re so old and dried out. Then let’s put on some battered clothes and some sandals with patches on them.” So when they started out on this journey, these guys are quite a sight.

They get to Gilgal and you can imagine them stepping off the camels or donkeys, whatever they’re riding. They get to the people and they’re probably stretching their backs. “It’s such a long journey.” They’re really hamming it up. They say, “We’ve come from a distant country and we want to make a peace treaty with you.” The Israelites are not absolute fools. They wanted proof. They said, “How do we know you didn’t come from some place near by. And they said, “Joshua, we’re your servants. You’re the great, great warrior. We wouldn’t trick you. We wouldn’t even try it.” Joshua says, “Well, tell me exactly where you come from.” They said, “Well, Joshua, we come from a galaxy far, far away.” (Laughter!) “We have come all this way because we heard about the LORD your God.” They even spun that religious theme into the deception. They said, “We really, really revere your God, your LORD. He’s the most powerful LORD God of all. We heard about what He did in Egypt. We heard about what He did to the east of the Jordan River. We heard about all these things. We said here is a nation whose God is great. We want to make peace with this great nation. So that’s why we’re here.”

They knew and Joshua knew that there was a provision in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 20, that if there is a people who are from a distant land who want to make peace, you can go ahead and make a peace treaty. But they also knew that God told Joshua, “If there’s anybody inside the land I’m giving you and they want a peace treaty, don’t give it to them.” So that’s why they said, “We have to act like we’re from a far, far country. We have to make this look right.” So Joshua looked at them suspiciously. And then they said, “If you don’t believe us, come look in our bags. We started off with hot bread. Look at how moldy this bread is. We started off with wineskins and the desert sun has baked them and cracked them so that they don’t hold any more wine. Look at our sandals. Do you think we would wear these anywhere? Look at our clothes. Do you think we’d leave home looking like this?

***14*** *So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD.* ***15*** *And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.*

The men of Gibeon thought, “Mission accomplished! We are safe. These guys are good for their word!” Then they left for home. It didn’t take very long, about three days, before Joshua realized that he had been deceived. He learned the real story and that they had been duped. They take off to get to Gibeon. They arrive in Gibeon and Joshua and the people of Israel are as mad as hornets. But they didn’t attack them because they made a peace treaty. They are going to keep their word. They knew that the Lord is holy and He would not have them break a word, a promise that they made in the name of the LORD. That would dishonor God. The people, though, they were all mad at their leaders. “Why did you guys do this? Don’t you know that this keeps us from occupying this specific land? Don’t you know that these folks are going to stay in the land and there is spiritual danger that God warned against, that they would become a snare to us? Didn’t you know that?” They looked like fools. “All we can do now is keep our word and trust the LORD. What we’ll do is we’re going to make them servants in the house of God. They’re going to be woodcutters for the house of God, the place of worship, for the altar of the LORD. They’re going to carry water for the priests. That’s what they’re going to do.”

Now, what spiritual lessons do we draw from this story? Again, there are a lot of them, but I really want us to focus on the spiritual lesson that grabs my attention. That is that we need to pray on our knees, friends, on our knees! We are only safe when we’re on our knees. This story teaches us four reasons why we must pray.

**Reason #1: The enemy is strong and crafty.**

God had promised to bless Israel. He had promised to give them a land. God’s promises to bless us don’t stop God’s enemies from being active, however. God didn’t promise them that there wasn’t going to be any enemies in the land when He gave them the land. In fact, He told them there are enemies. God is up front about that. There are real enemies seeking to rob you of the blessing that I am guaranteeing for you and for this people. For the Israelites, it was the Canaanites that were living in the land. For us, it’s enemies that include Satan and his minions. It includes the world that is hostile to God. It includes a principle at work inside of us called the flesh, which loves sin.

The principle is that God’s enemies hate for God’s people to receive God’s blessing. Can I say that again? God’s enemies hate for God’s people to receive God’s promised blessings. They hate for God to receive the glory when we as God’s people receive His blessing. They hate for that! So they hate for us to receive blessing because they hate for God to receive the glory because they hate God. They want His glory. The Israelites, again, their blessings are many, but what is primarily in view here is this land. It is a land that was to be theirs, occupied by them for the worship of God. For us, the blessings of God are nearly infinite in number. As New Testament, new covenant believers, we have so many blessings. In fact, the Apostle Paul says this in Ephesians 1. He says

**Ephesians 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

God’s enemies are active in this world in which we live. Who are those? Satan and his minions, this world that is around us that is hostile to God, and there is something inside us called the flesh. Each one of those enemies seeks to rob us of the joy of the blessing God has already secured for us in Christ.

What are some of those blessings? Let’s think of some of them. One of those blessings is just peace of heart and mind in the midst of trouble. There is a freedom from worry and a freedom from anxiety. Let me ask you, as we mention these blessings, to ask yourself: Am I enjoying these blessings that God has secured for me in Christ, or have the enemies fought so hard against my soul that I’m not enjoying the blessing that God has already granted me in Christ? Ask that question as I just recite some of these blessings.

First, is peace, tranquility, calm in our hearts in the midst of any circumstance. Second is freedom from guilt and shame of our past sins. It’s a promised blessing through the blood of Jesus. There is freedom to feel clean because we’ve been made clean. Another blessing is power over sin, to overcome temptations that wage war against our soul. Another blessing is hope in the face of death, our own death and the death of people we love. There is hope. We don’t despair. We don’t grieve in darkness, but we grieve upward toward the light of God. We still grieve, but we grieve with hope. That’s a blessing. There is also the blessing of adoption into God’s family that makes us know we are never ever alone. We’re never alone! We are part of God’s family. He cares for us. We’re not orphans. Never! Another blessing is guidance from the Holy Spirit so we never feel lost and without a clear path, a way forward. Another blessing is love in our hearts so we’re not eaten up by bitterness and anger from wrongs that we’ve suffered from people who have hurt us. We’re free of that. It’s a blessing from God. There is comfort from our Father that soothes us in our deepest losses. Another blessing is new desires in our heart so that God’s commandments are not burdensome. These are just a few of the blessings, but I want us to think about them because do you see how God’s enemies are waging war against your soul and against our church family, to rob us? The LORD fights for us, but we still must fight! That’s why Paul says to Timothy

**1 Timothy 6:12** Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called…

In other words, God has given eternal life. We don’t have to do anything. But in order to enjoy it, we have to take hold of it. We have to fight to maintain our own privilege in the midst of the blessings that have already been secured for us.

**2 Corinthians 2:11** we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

What are the schemes of the enemy? Well, I think they are two-fold. Number one, Satan would rob us of God’s blessing or the joy of God’s blessing, the experience of God’s blessing, through a direct attack that brings dread and fear upon us. Fear is a major tool in Satan’s toolbox. But secondly, also his strategy that we’re not ignorant of is not just a direct attack, but also an indirect attack through deception. Satan loves to make things appear to be what they are not. Here in Joshua, we find Satan work in both ways. First, at Ai there is a direct attack by the enemy and thirty-six people are killed. The Israelite army is routed. That’s a direct attack. And then, a couple chapters over there is this attack through deception. The Gibeonites fooled them. Satan does both. And here again, at the beginning of Joshua 9, we see all of these armies who are gathered together make war against Joshua and against Israel. That’s a direct attack.

***1*** *As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard of this,* ***2*** *they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.*

There is sort of an explanation of secular history, here. But more than that, God intends for us to see the spiritual dynamic behind this event. There is a spiritual battle being waged to defeat God and His glory and His purposes.

Friends, the idea here is that Scripture everywhere tells us we shouldn’t be surprised when we are threatened or bullied or criticized or demeaned or attacked for the sake of the Gospel. We must not surrender. We must not cower, but we must engage in that fight with the weapons that God has given us. We must fight with the full armor of God secured, so that we would be able to stand against the assault of the evil one. Though his fiery darts come flashing in, the shield of faith will extinguish them. But we must fight. And how do we fight? We fight by gathering together to the worship of God, to encourage one another, pushing forward in mission. But again here, it’s the message that we do this through prayer. God is the one who gives us victory! We are not the ones who secure it. It is God Himself. With David, we say,“The battle is the Lord’s!” With Paul we say, “We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us!”

Beloved, we should expect our lives to be filled with direct opposition from God’s enemies. We must be ready to stand for Jesus. So let’s pray! Let’s reason why we must pray. It’s because the enemy is strong and the enemy is crafty. We have to ask ourselves the question:Am I ready for battle? Together we ask ourselves the question: Are we, this church family, ready for battle?

A major part of this story is that second strategy: deception of the Gibeonites. Our enemy is not only dreadful and fierce, but he is deceitful.Satan, our world, and the flesh most often use trickery to keep us from God’s blessing, enjoying His blessing. God uses two key word pictures in Scripture to describe Satan. In 1 Peter 5, He calls him “a roaring lion.” But then in 2 Corinthians 11, He calls Satan “an angel of light.” Those are two different strategies. A roaring lion comes full force. Bam! It hits us with force and ferocity. And sometimes, Satan does that in his attacks. But most often, I think, he uses the second strategy as an angel of light. He appears to be someone who is really, really good. The Gibeonites appeared to be honest, good-hearted, God-fearing people. Satan doesn’t kick the front door down to rob us most often. He most often, I believe, tries to sneak through a window of our life.

What is the window of our life? It’s the temptation to sin. It’s false ideas about God, and false doctrine. He uses really winsome sounding people, really likeable personalities to get ideas in our head that are just simply not true about God. Or He shows us sins that seem so lovely, seem so attractive, seem so rewarding, seem so sweet to the taste. And all the while, he hides the poison inside that piece of candy. Friends, let us prepare for these battles by walking forward with God together in prayer.

Notice how crafty the Gibeonites are in their deceit. Temptation to sin and false teachers are never obvious. It doesn’t ever seem like that which comes to deceive us is a deceiver. It always is so subtle. Joshua was no fool! Joshua has lived a long life. He’s seen a lot of things, and yet he is fooled here. Why is he fooled? The answer is, he didn’t pray. Verse 14 tells us he didn’t stop to consult with the LORD. He thought, “I think I have enough wisdom, enough smarts to get this one right.” He stopped being dependent upon the LORD.

***14*** *So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD.*

So the first reason why we must pray is that our enemy is crafty. Our enemies are strong. They’re deceitful.

**Reason #2: Our own understanding is not reliable.**

Things are not always as they seem. Here, it seemed like from every outward appearance that they had the story right. We could make excuses for the Israelites and say, “Well, it’s right to trust people, isn’t it? The Gibeonites played a trick on them. It’s not really a fault to be fooled.” And the answer is if we’re not praying, it is a fault to be fooled, because they wouldn’t have been fooled if they had consulted God. I’m not saying it’s always a fault to be fooled. I’m just saying if we’ve not prayed and we’re fooled, then it is our fault to be fooled.

***14*** *So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD.*

Joshua is a great man of faith. I don’t know very many people that I would point to as people of faith that have greater faith than Joshua. Yet here, on this occasion, this great man of faith walked by sight. It’s a danger to us all, isn’t it? Every morning, we have a decision to make. Am I going to walk by faith or am I going to walk by sight? Favorite Bible verses for kids, and rightly so, are Proverbs 3:5-6.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

What does it mean to acknowledge Him? Acknowledging Him in all our ways, all our decisions, at the very least, means that we pray over everything. Prayer is the ultimate expression of our dependence upon the Lord. So we ask the question: When is it right to trust in my own understanding and just act? When is that right? The answer is never, never, never! That’s why Paul says to pray without ceasing. Just live in a constant state of connection, consulting with the Lord over everything. Acknowledge God in everything. James says,

**James 1:5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

We all do lack wisdom. But God gives it abundantly! Let’s be quick to acknowledge our need for God to give us wisdom through prayer. And beloved, let us never trust our own feelings, our own reason, our own hearts. Do not lean on your own understanding, God says.

You know, for this decision at this point, it seemed like it was a no-brainer, but it wasn’t. It was deception. Smart people are fooled most often because they naturally rely on their own smarts. So if you’re one of the smart people, and I know we have a lot of smart people out here…I’m amazed at how many smart people we have. It’s great that God gives great intellect. But know that you’re even in greater danger if God has given you a great mind because it’s so easy to take that great mind and begin to trust it, trust your past experiences, trust your own reasoning, your own rationale.

***14*** *So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD.*

What is ironic here is that they had just made the same mistake at Ai. Remember? They didn’t pray then before they attacked Ai and they got beaten up for it. Then they came off the defeat and they go back. Doesn’t that say something when we point our finger at Joshua or the Israelites and say, “Those are terrible people. What foolish people!” It says something about us. God wrote these stories here for our own encouragement, to say I’m like that. One moment I realize that I didn’t pray and I suffered for it. I’m not receiving God’s blessings because I just failed to pray. Then we get victory and we’re riding high because we pray and God is gracious to us. The next moment, what has happened? We’re not praying again. That’s the reason why we need each other, brothers and sisters, to remind each other and encourage each other all the more as the Day draws near, to gather together and encourage, encourage, encourage because faith is not our natural preset. Sight is. We walk by sight, not by faith. But we need to do the opposite. We need to encourage each other. Not only is the enemy strong and crafty, not only is our own understanding not reliable, but

**Reason #3: We suffer loss when we do not pray.**

Joshua and the Israelites were fooled by the Gibeonites because they didn’t pray. And what happened? There were two consequences of this disaster of being deceived. The Gibeonites are going to live in the land and they are potentially going to be a snare for the Israelites the rest of their days. They’re even mentioned all the way 1,000 years later in Nehemiah, the Gibeonites are. Now, God did a work of grace in the Gibeonites. So that’s another part of the story that we don’t have time to talk about. God did a work of grace, but because they were there, the people knew, one, we’re not going to occupy the land they’re occupying. So that’s a little piece of the property that is not going to be solely ours. They’re going to be present. They’re going to offer a temptation and a snare to run after their gods. But secondly, there was internal conflict. Look at verse 18.

***18*** *Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders.*

The people were unified after victory. Now they’re saying, “Our leaders are a bunch of worthless people. Don’t you know any better? I would have been better if I would have been in that place.” It’s disrupting their internal joy and peace. Why did Joshua not pray? I think he thought at the time that he was good without it. We rarely see what we would lose through a lack of prayer. But we always suffer some loss when we do not pray. When should we pray? Always!

Do you have decisions to make? Specifically always we should pray, but especially when we have decisions to make. Let me just ask you some practical questions. Do you pray before you take a promotion at work or is that kind of a no brainer? I mean, it’s something you hoped for all this time. You thought, “Well that’s a no-brainer. I’d just take that. It’s what I’ve been working for.” Do you pray before you begin a dating relationship that you’re really excited about? “I’ve been hoping this guy or this gal would be interested in me! So I don’t even need to pray about that because my heart is already there.” Do you pray before you choose a college or does your gut, your internal desires, tell you what is right? Do you pray before making a big purchase or do you already know that you need that thing? Do you pray before accepting a ministry at church or do you think that is unnecessary because it’s obvious? Do you pray before deciding whether your children will be involved with basketball, orchestra, drama, dance or gymnastics or do you already know what is best for them? Do you see how we could go on and on and on and on? Let’s do that. Let’s go on and on and on and let’s pray over every decision. False confidence robs us of God’s blessing. The enemy is strong and crafty. Our understanding is not reliable. We suffer when we don’t pray.

**Reason #4: God is willing to bless us.**

That’s why we should pray. We have a God who is so generous. James says

**James 4:2** You do not have, because you do not ask.

God has already showed Himself gracious by offering this people this land. He’s shown Himself gracious by giving them all these spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. That’s the kind of God we have. We have a good, good Father. We’re loved by Him and He loves to bless His people. So let’s pray. Let’s pray with a view that God has some blessings for us that wouldn’t be ours if we didn’t ask. So let’s ask.

I’m super excited this week because my oldest son, his wife, and their two children just moved here this week. So be friendly to them. Let them know they have a church family that loves them. But sweet little Malakai is two and a half years old. He’s over there. By the way, I listened to Josh last week while I was in New Jersey and he had some illustrations with his children. And I thought, “I have not been able to use illustrations for a while. But Malakai is here!” (Laughter!) Sweet Malakai, we got him some gifts to open up. We only let him open them up one a day. So when I would go to see him, oftentimes now he will say, “Presents? Presents, Grandpa? Presents?” I love that! I love that he asks. It brings a delight to my heart. “Presents?” Why do I love to hear that? Because I love him! I love to have a generous heart toward him. That heart is nothing compared to the generous heart our Father has toward us. And my ability to give good gifts is nothing compared to the ability our Father has to give us good gifts. So why aren’t we calling out constantly, “Presents? Presents, God!”

Why should we pray? We have an enemy that wants to rob us of blessing. Why should we pray? We can’t rely on our own understanding to make decisions in life. Why should we pray? We always lose when we don’t pray. Why should we pray? Because God is generous.

I want to close with an application. Here in verse 14 again, they didn’t ask counsel from the Lord. That was the issue. So we might ask the question, how do I ask counsel from the Lord? How do I? What does that mean for me today? They had the urim and the thummim back in the day of Joshua. I think that the preamble to the story kind of gives us some real practical action steps. The preamble is that pep rally they had and then what happened in the story.

So the first action step if you want to know how to receive counsel from the Lord, number one, take yourself to the cross of Jesus. That’s where it all begins. Let’s take ourselves together as well as individually, together to the cross of Jesus saying, “Lord, apart from Jesus, we want to remember what He did for us, exult in it, receive all the blessing of that and remember that we can only stand before you, we can only receive hope to receive counsel or blessing from you because of Jesus. Joshua built the altar to remind us that first, we need grace, and secondly, that God is the God of grace. That’s what the altar and the sacrifices symbolized. And that’s what Jesus does. So let’s grab hands with one another and say, “Let’s go to Jesus and remember what He did. We are a people who need grace and we have been given grace upon grace upon grace.” That’s where you have to start. I want to just stop there for a moment. If any of you have never gone to the foot of Jesus to receive forgiveness of sin, receive eternal life, that’s where you must start. Or else there is no counsel of God that He will bring to you. As believers, we continue to go to the foot of the cross over and over and over.

Secondly, meditate on God’s Word together. Remember Joshua wrote out the book of the law on stones. And it wasn’t enough that he wrote it out so the people could go back to it and read it, read it, read it, but then he also said, “We’re all going to get together and just sit down and I’m going to read it to you.” So if we want to take counsel from the Lord, we open up the precious Word that God has given to us. And we do it together as well. It’s not just individually, personally. I need you to read this Word with me together so that we’re hearing God together in order to receive counsel from Him.

And then finally, pray! We go to God and we ask Him, “God, guide us. You’re our Shepherd. Guide us.” Remember the guide as he grabbed George Smith. He said, “On your knees, sir. You are safe here only on your knees!”

This week, won’t you make a commitment, make a commitment with me this week to begin your days differently than what you began the last seven days. Unless of course the last seven days have been absolutely perfect in relationship to prayer. And by the way, I would be the first to admit that my last seven days were not perfect in that. And I want to ask you to pray for me and let’s pray for each other and encourage each other. Begin the next seven days by taking fifteen minutes just to consult with God, to bring ourselves to the cross, to open up God’s Word if you can, with other brothers and sisters, whether it’s in your house or in this church family. Open up God’s Word and say, “Let’s listen to God’s Word together,” and then to pray for everything that God would have roll through your soul. Won’t you do that? Just these next seven days. God will bless us!