

THE PERIL OF WALKING BY SIGHT

Joshua 9-10

Introduction

In a context where the apostle Paul has been discussing his ministry as an ambassador of Christ (see 2 Cor. 4:1-5:20), he declares “for we walk by faith, not by sight.” ***To walk by faith is to walk in a spirit of prayerful dependence on the Lord and His guidance.***

Jeremiah makes an interesting statement when he declares, “I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.” (Jeremiah 10:23 ESV) Man does not have the wisdom or ability, nor often the will to direct his own way for, as Proverbs tells us, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” (Proverbs 14:12 ESV) Our need is to always commit our way, our objectives, our pursuits, and our responsibilities to the Lord for not only His will and wisdom, but for His enablement. The danger we face is that we will presume on God’s grace and strike out in our own wisdom without really seeking and searching His heart and blessing while ever realizing our total inadequacy and need of His grace.

The danger of presumption and walking by sight is amplified many times over when we consider the fact we are in an age old conflict with supernatural forces that are extremely cunning and many times more powerful than are we. We see the material world, we see flesh and blood, and we can see the physical evidence and think, “I can handle this...it’s not that difficult.” But we must always be wary because often we are not just dealing with just flesh and blood. Rather, we are dealing with an insidious enemy who uses people to promote his schemes.

In the passage before us today we see demonstrated in the life of Joshua and his people the danger of failing to commit their way to the Lord, the peril of prayerlessness and the peril of walking by sight—making decisions on the basis of how things appear.

Let’s look at the text – Joshua 9 – to see what God has to say to us today.

I. Examining the Text

vv. 1-2 – the context, setting the stage. The opposition – this is the enemy we can see. *Read these verses.*

The record given here is typical of Satan’s strategies. Powerful alliances began immediately to form in both the north and the south of Canaan. Where tribal warfare had gone on for years, suddenly deadly enemies were brought together in alliances as they united against the invasion of God’s people into the land.

Campbell and Denny, in their commentary on Joshua, make an interesting observation:

“When righteousness becomes aggressive and bent on an objective, it has a way of uniting the forces of righteousness and the enemies of righteousness. It happened this way when Jesus Christ launched his earthly ministry. His aggressive ministry of healing, preaching, and the confrontation of sin galvanized his own followers—but it also welded together three groups which had formerly been enemies, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians.

The more boldly the Christian faith advances, the more vocal and violent the opposition will become.”

In our text, it appears that all the city-states in mountainous regions joined forces against Israel as a means of trying to keep Joshua and his army from attacking and taking one city at a time as had been done with Jericho and Ai.

The opposition was obvious – it was an enemy Joshua and his people could see. But, what they did not realize was that there was a far more insidious enemy, one they could not see.

vv. 3-15 – the strategy of the enemy – deception

Not all the surrounding city-states were willing to openly go against Israel in view of Israel’s incredible victories. The Gibeonites, which included a league of cities (see vs. 17), concocted a clever ruse designed to deceive the Israelites and hide their true identity—a typical strategy of Satan, the deceiver. Their goal, which was successful, was to convince the Israelites they were from a country outside the land (vs. 6). They evidently somehow knew that God had commanded the Israelites to totally destroy all the inhabitants of the land. Their claim was that they were

impressed with the great things Joshua had done and so they wanted a treaty allowing them to live because they were not of the land of Canaan.

It is hard not to admire the Gibeonites for their scheme. In view of verse 9, it appears they really did believe in the power of the God of Israel much like Rahab. The Gibeonites were not cowards (cf. 10:2), but they knew they could not withstand the power of God. So they did the next best thing in their thinking; they turned to deception through disguise. This resulted in two major approaches:

(1) They played on the sympathies of the Israelites by appearing as weary travelers who had been on a long journey. Their garments were dirty and worn, their food was dry and moldy (or hard, crumbly), their wineskins old and patched, and their sandals worn and thin.

(2) They played on the ego of the Israelites and their sense of pride. They insisted that they had come from a great distance to show their respect for the power of the God of the Israelites and wanted to be allowed to live as the servants of Israel.

Caught off guard, Joshua and the leaders of Israel listened to the story of the Gibeonites and they made two fatal mistakes:

(1) They made the mistake of allowing the Gibeonites to play on their emotions. They accepted the evidence, though questionable, without further and more reliable evidence. Here we see *the peril of sight versus faith and fact*.

(2) The primary mistake, however, is not seeking counsel from the Lord. Look at v. 14. They should have sought direction from the Lord through the Urim and Thummim. Here we see *the peril of presumption through prayerlessness*.

It is always a mistake for us to lean on our own wisdom or judgment and make our own plans apart from God's direction. It was a mistake then ... and it still is. The exhortation of God's Word is:

"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. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil." (Proverbs 3:5-7 ESV)

F.B. Meyer, in his book, "Joshua: And the Land of Promise", put it very succinctly. He says,

"Before entering into any alliance—taking a partner in life, going into business with another, yielding assent to any proposition which involves confederation with others—be sure to ask counsel at the mouth of the Lord. He will assuredly answer by an irresistible impulse—by the voice of a friend; by a circumstance strange and unexpected; by a passage of Scripture. He will choose His own messenger; but He will send a message."

Even though Satan surely knows he can never really defeat the Lord and that he is a defeated foe, he nevertheless turns to his many tricks and deceptive devices to defeat God's purposes for and with His people.

vv. 16-27 – the aftermath of the deception. Review briefly what happens when Joshua discovers the deception. He refuses to go back on his word, but they decide to make the Gibeonites slaves. They would become woodcutters and water-bearers for the Israelites, especially in relation to the tabernacle service.

II. Extracting the Principles

There are a number of principles that come out of this passage today. I want to just briefly outline some of these for you.

1. Temptation and the attack of the enemy often comes in its strongest form after our greatest victories and times of highest emotion. Note the context – chapter 8 – the renewal of the covenant on Mount Ebal. It was a mountaintop kind of experience, but Satan knows that when we begin to think that we have made it because of our spiritual experiences, we let down our guard and he loves to take advantage of that.
2. Deception and disguise brings a curse – v. 23ff – partial fulfillment of Noah's prediction that Canaan would be the slave of Seth.
3. Two wrongs can never make a right – v. 18 – Joshua knew that to go back on his word and destroy the Gibeonites, would only bring more trouble, so they kept the vow they had made.
4. God's purposes are not thwarted by our mistakes. **That does not mean it doesn't matter if we do wrong!!** But God can overrule and His purpose will be accomplished. Ch. 10 – He used the treaty with the Gibeonites as a means and motivation to bring about the destruction of the five Amorite kings.

5. *** We put ourselves in a very dangerous position when we begin to trust our own judgement instead of relying on God.

Conclusion

Contrast: faith ⇔ sight; Self-reliance ⇔ Reliance on God; Prayerlessness ⇔ Dependence on God.

Challenge – to do everything in dependence upon God. Walk by faith not by sight. ***To walk by faith is to walk in a spirit of prayerful dependence on the Lord and His guidance.***