

Whose Side are you on?

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[0 : 00] to soften our hearts and give us attentive ears that you may accomplish all you mean to purpose through your words. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bloodshed. Peoples devoted to destruction. Kings hanging on trees. Please, welcome to our tri-church service at St. Silas.

If you're new to the Christian faith, you may be wondering what on earth you're doing here this evening and what you've just walked into and thinking, well, if this is what it's all about, then no thank you.

You can keep that to yourselves sort of thing. But at St. Silas, we believe that every part of Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for our salvation.

That means that we don't shy away from difficult passages, but work systematically through whole books of the Bible. So the section that we've just had read to us by David wasn't chosen specifically for Tri-Church this evening, but simply because these chapters follow on from the chapter that was read and studied last week.

[1 : 26] Now having said that, I am persuaded that these very chapters, difficult though they most certainly are, are particularly apt for us this evening because they ask of us a very important question.

Whose side are you on? A question so important that it has eternal significance for each of us here. Whose side are you on?

The rock star Alice Cooper, at some point in his life, Alice Cooper realized that he was on the wrong side.

In the 1960s and 70s, he was drinking partners with hellraisers like Jim Morrison from The Doors, Jimi Hendrix, and Keith Moon, the maniac drummer from The Who.

Recently he was interviewed about why he became a Christian. He says, I totally realized that hell was not going to be getting high with Jim Morrison.

[2 : 34] Hell was going to be the worst place ever. He goes on, you know, a lot of people say they come to Christ because of the love of Jesus.

I came to Christ because of my fear of God. In fear, I returned to the Lord. In fear, I came back to the Lord.

We need to first be confronted by the fearfulness of God's wrath if we're going to be able to appreciate the tenderness of God's grace.

And in these chapters in Joshua, the question, Whose side are you on? is answered in response to the fear of the Lord, fear of God's coming judgment.

We're going to be seeing two very different reactions. Firstly, fear of what's coming leads the kings to stand against Joshua and God's people.

[3 : 36] And then secondly, fear of what's coming leads the Gibeonites to seek refuge with Joshua and God's people. Now we're going to be looking at both of these in turn in just a moment.

But before we do so, I want us to be clear that these two very different reactions are in response to the very same thing. Fear for their lives.

Self-preservation. They'd all heard reports of Israel's recent victories and it was coming closer to home, too close for comfort.

So in chapter 9, verse 1, the coalition of kings heard of these things. A couple of verses on in verse 3, the Gibeonites too heard what Israel had done to Jericho and Ai.

And by chapter 10, verse 2, once the king of Jerusalem had got wind of the treaty between God's people and Gibeon, he and his people were very much alarmed at this. They feared greatly, as another translation puts it.

[4 : 41] And so both the Gibeonites and the kings knew that if they didn't do something about it, they were the ones that were going to be becoming a cropper next. So let's see what happens to each of these.

And firstly, we're going to look at the Gibeonites who seek refuge with God's people. So as the other nations conspire together against Joshua and the people of God, the Gibeonites realize their inability to stand against Israel and Israel's God.

And they feared greatly for their lives. It tells us that later on in verse 24. So they resort, verse 4, to a cunning ruse.

The Gibeonites seem to know that Israel wasn't allowed to enter into treaty with the Canaanite nations. And they come up with a plan to deceive Israel into thinking that they've come from afar and make a covenant with them, a binding treaty that will preserve themselves and protect them in safety.

One of my best pals from the art school works in the film industry now in the costume department of films. And her job is to use all sorts of different techniques to manipulate and distress garments and make them appear old and worn in the cinema screen.

[6 : 06] Well, that's exactly what the Gibeonites are doing here. And it's an Oscar-worthy performance. So just look at the lengths that they go to. Read along with me in verse 4.

Their donkeys are loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. You see, it's all in the detail. They put on worn and patched sandals and wore old clothes and their bread's gone off.

It's stale and moldy. Now that's commitment. It's really disgusting, really. But they're able to point to these things when the Israelites question them in verse 7. But perhaps you live near us.

And then when Joshua asks them in verse 8, Who are you? And where do you come from?

Although the first part of their answer isn't true, they've come from about 15 kilometers away, certainly not from a very distant country.

But look at what they say next. We have come because of the fame of the Lord your God. We have come because of the fame of the Lord your God.

[7 : 10] We have heard reports of him, all that he did in Egypt and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan. Well, if you've been about for the whole series in Joshua, then you'll maybe recall the way that Rahab the prostitute, another non-Israelite, similarly rehearsed before the Israelites the greatness of God and the victories of God's people.

The Gibeonites also relate, if you scan down to verse 24, that they've heard that the Lord had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you.

Now this is interesting because it's in virtually the same breath that Moses had commanded Israel back in Deuteronomy, A, to devote the surrounding nations to complete destruction, and B, not to enter into covenant with them or show mercy to them.

So the Gibeonites actually have a pretty decent understanding of the judgment that's coming their way, and it's out of desperation and self-preservation as I say that they're acting in this way. Now Israel, for its part, fails to seek God's counsel.

He told that in verse 14. The Israelites sampled the moldy bread, but they did not inquire of the Lord.

[8 : 45] And it was then that Joshua made a treaty of peace which the leaders then ratified. And when the deception is uncovered just three days later in verse 16, it's too late.

The covenant has been made. And to their credit, the leaders of Israel don't go back on their word. Instead, Joshua curses the Gibeonites, verse 23, making them servants of the tabernacle.

So what are we to make of this episode? What are we to do with these Gibeonites? Well, I think we, first of all, have to acknowledge that it's messy.

If only they were more like Rahab who wholeheartedly aligned herself with Israel, deceiving the people of Jericho to that end.

Whereas the Gibeonite motivation is suspect, they want to make peace of Israel, but they deceive the people of Israel to their own end.

[9 : 47] They end up cursed, but through that curse their lives are spared. By hook or by crook, they're chosen to side with Israel and seek refuge with God's people.

And God shows mercy to them. Now, if it's messy for the Gibeonites, then it's also messy for Joshua and for God's people too.

If the main question that we're thinking about this evening, the main question that these chapters ask of us this evening is whose side are you on? Then there's also an important secondary question.

Whose strength do we draw on? We've seen in verse 14 that here, the Israelites rely on their own strength. They don't inquire of the Lord's.

This is all the more striking because at the end of last week's passage, we're told that there was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly.

[10:51] They've just done their quiet time. Just done their corporate quiet time. In fact, they've just finished their entire read the Bible in a year study plan in a day.

And things seem to be going pretty well in their relationship with God. They put the sins of Achan behind them. But because they did not inquire of the Lord at this important juncture, it forces them into a compromising situation that has significant and far-reaching consequences for them.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot afford to let our guard down. Things may not always be as they seem, and we need to be prayerfully dependent on the Lord when it comes to things that require spiritual discernment.

And is this not especially true when it comes to big decisions, big commitments? Who to marry, where to live, who to work for? But also for smaller, more trivial decisions like what to do on a Friday night, how to spend our time in an evening.

Don't enter into these things lightly, friends. but commit them to prayer in choir of the Lord.

Nevertheless, there is grace.

[12:20] And as we'll see in the next chapter, we'll come on to chapter 10, God uses this unfortunate compromise to advance his purposes for his kingdom.

And the same is true for us. Our lives are messy and imperfect, not as we would wish very often when it comes down to it. Our lives are messy.

We make mistakes. We live with the consequences. But God uses us in all our failure, all our brokenness, to create something beautiful out of our lives for his good purposes.

verses. Let's turn now to the coalition of kings that stand opposed to God's people in chapter 10.

We're given in the book of Joshua a picture, a picture of God fulfilling his plan to give a land to his people.

[13:23] And it's a picture that finds its ultimate fulfillment fulfillment when Christ will return and lead his people into his eternal kingdom of the new heavens and the new earth.

And this picture of being brought into a promised land is accompanied both in the book of Joshua and when Christ returns by judgment. God's righteous, wrathful response to human sin.

And the Bible is clear that this judgment is inevitable. It's not a case of if but when and it's imminent. It's coming soon.

And it's a gruesome picture this coming judgment but actually it's a kindness. It's a kindness that we're shown this gruesome picture of it in Joshua.

We're not to bury our heads in the sand but be alert to the reality. An atheist Penn Gillette one half of the comedy duo Penn and Teller he's an atheist but he gets this much right.

[14:36] He says if you believe that there's a heaven and a hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life how much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them about it.

I mean if I believe he goes on if I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming to hit you and you didn't believe that the truck was bearing down on you there's a certain point where I step in and tackle you and this is more important than that.

It's an eternal reality with regards to final judgment we have to make up our minds about whose side we're on.

We've seen what happens with the Gibeonites when they side with God's people. Now in chapter 10 we see what happens to the kings and their nations when they stand opposed to the Lord's judgment.

We're going to see that the Lord himself steps in to fight against all those who oppose him. So the kings gather again at the beginning of the chapter this time to fight Gibeon and their ringleader is Adonai Zedek the king of Jerusalem.

[15 : 57] Now this is a fascinating name because way back in Genesis chapter 14 some hundreds of years prior to these events in Joshua we have Melchizedek Melchizedek the king of Salem the same the king of Jerusalem and Melchizedek means king of righteousness Adonai Zedek in our chapter means the lord of righteousness and it's ironic in our chapter because he's anything but whereas Melchizedek blesses Abraham Adonai Zedek stands opposed to Abraham's descendants and those who have sided with them so in verse 3 Adonai Zedek appeals to the five kings of Amorites and he says come and help me attack he says because Gibeon has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites so this disparate group of kings find themselves united in their opposition to the lord and his people these kings and their people join forces and line up to fight against Gibeon but verse 6 the Gibeonites cry out to Joshua for salvation save us and help us they cry apparently they become Anglicans overnight save us and help us and the lord tells Joshua in verse 8 do not be afraid of them because the lord has already given the enemy into Joshua's hands not one of them will be able to withstand you if the lord is for us who can be against us and do you see how the battle belongs to the lord it is the lord who fights on Israel's behalf verse 10 the lord threw them into a panic this is the same language that's found in Exodus 14 when god did the very same thing to the Egyptian army in the red sea the lord threw them into confusion and literally he struck them with a very great blow verse 11 as they fled before Israel the lord hurled large hailstones down in them and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the sword and the lord in verses 12 to 14 makes the sun stand still for a whole day until Israel's victory is complete over its enemies it's worth just pausing here and thinking about what's going on with the sun and the moon and the experts bible commentators are divided about exactly what's happened the mechanism by which it might have occurred and how exactly this may have benefited the Israelites over the Amorites but it seems from the text itself the relative position of the sun appeared at least to stand still in the east over Gibeon and the relative position of the moon appeared to stand in the west over Eglon whatever happened it's clear that the exceptional nature of the cosmic event at Gibeon is underscored for us in verse 14 that there has never been a day like it before or since but did you notice what's striking here is what's emphasized it's not it's not the cosmic event itself that's so amazing so much as the way that it was in response to Joshua's prayer for God's miraculous intervention there's never been such a day before since a day when the Lord heeded the voice of man and so through this incredible display of God's judgment and power the Gibeonites are saved and God's people are shown what happens when they rely not on their own strength but in prayerful dependence on God's strength and we're also shown that the question whose side are you on is flipped on its head it's not so much a case of whose side are we on that matters as much as whose side the Lord is on because this is what's divisive in verse 14 surely the Lord was fighting for Israel the Lord fights for Israel and delivers their enemies into their hands and the nations are silenced that's what it says in verse 21 the nations are silenced after this no one uttered a word against Israel the exact phrase used during the final plague in Egypt no one uttered a word against them the proud kings of the nations opposed to God's people are found gathered together again in verse 16 this time cowering in the cave at Makeda and then in verse 24 as the commanders of Israel make them a footstool for their feet gathered together these five kings united together in lives opposed to the Lord are found united in death executed by Joshua in verse 26 who then hangs them on five tree poles in a public display of curse and humiliation and then buried by sunset in the cave in Makeda where they'd originally been hiding the burial completed by rolling huge boulders across the cave front in order to seal it which are there to this very day it says and so this serves as the fifth stone monument set up by the Israelites after they've entered the land of promise so that they would not forget what the Lord has accomplished on their behalf standing in opposition to the Lord is futile his judgment is coming and we are all deserving of his wrath as the apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans there is no one righteous no one not even one we cannot save ourselves we cannot stand before God's judgment we've not got a leg to stand on when it comes to our own merit the rock star Alice Cooper returned to God out of fear of the coming judgment he needed to first understand that God was terrifying in order to be able to appreciate that he's also tender you see God raised up for us another king in Jerusalem one who the prophet

[22 : 58] Jeremiah foretold would be called the Lord our righteous savior king Jesus the righteous king who did not stand opposed to God's will but instead bore the wrath on our behalf of God's

righteous anger as he hung on the cursed tree of crucifixion his body was laid in a tomb a boulder rolled across the mouth of the cave and Roman soldiers posted to guard it the victorious king Jesus who conquered death and rose from the grave an empty tomb there a monument to prove he lives king Jesus who beckons you and invites you to join his side and seek refuge in him whose side will you be on when Christ returns amen and let's pray heavenly father we tremble before you as we acknowledge your greatness and holiness we acknowledge that we cannot stand before you on our own merit that we thank you for your grace in giving us the opportunity to switch allegiance and to choose to join the side of king

Jesus and seek refuge in his righteousness help us to depend on you more faithfully in prayer and inquire of you when it comes to significant decisions we ask it in the name of our king and savior king Jesus the lord of righteousness amen