

HOW TO WALK AWAY FROM WALKING BY SIGHT (Joshua 9:1-27)

I am not going to preach a traditional Thanksgiving sermon today, but I do want to begin by telling you something for which I am thankful. I am thankful that English is my native language and that I did not have to learn it as a second language. I am told that while English is not the hardest language to learn, it is among the more difficult. I have no trouble believing that.

English is difficult to learn because there are so many contradictions. Here is a short poem that speaks of the wackiness of the English language:

Now if mouse in the plural should be, and is, mice,
Then house in the plural, of course, should be hice,
And grouse should be grice and spouse should be spice
And by the same token should blouse become blice.
And consider the goose with its plural of geese;
Then a double caboose should be called a cabeese,
And noose should be neese and moose should be meese
And if mama's papoose should be twins, it's papeese.
Then if one thing is that, while some more is called those,
Then more than one hat, I assume, would be hose,
And gnat would be gnose and pat would be pose,
And likewise the plural of rat would be rose.

English is difficult to learn because there are so many exceptions to rules. When I was in school, I was taught, "i before e except after c." But that doesn't always work. In the word *science*, the i comes after c, but it comes before the e. In the words *weird* and *seize*, there is no c, but the e comes first.

Why does the word *knife* have a silent k and *gnome* has a silent g? If they are silent, why are they even there?

English is difficult also because two words spelled the same way can be pronounced differently and have different meanings.

- The door was too close to the table to close.
- That bandage was wound around the wound.
- Don't desert your car in the desert.

There are many other reasons as to why English is such a difficult language to learn, but let me add just one more. In English, a single word can have numerous meanings. We will be looking at one such word today. It is the word *walk*. I looked up *walk* in an online dictionary. Walk is both a noun and a verb. We will be considering walk as a verb. According to that dictionary, the verb *walk* has 20 distinct meanings.

Most often, *walk* refers to bipedal locomotion, advancing by putting one foot after the other. There are many other meanings. Here are a few:

- In baseball, a walk is what a pitcher gives up when he throws four called balls to a

batter.

- In basketball, a walk is what a player commits when he takes too many steps without dribbling.
- In a labor dispute, the employees threaten to walk if their contract demands aren't met.
- A charity plans a walk to raise money for a worthy cause.
- When the prosecutor refuses to press charges, the guilty are allowed to walk.
- If you own a dog but live in an apartment, you will need to walk him or her daily.
- If you arrive at the hotel late and it is overbooked, they will walk you even though you have a reservation.

Walk is also a word we use to speak of how one conducts himself or herself in this life. That is how the Bible uses *walk* in many instances. Micah 6:8 calls upon us to walk humbly with our God. The Old Testament also encourages us to walk in His ways, to walk uprightly, to walk in God's truth, to walk in the way of righteousness, and to walk according to His law.

We read in the NT about walking in newness of life, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received, to walk in love, to walk in light, to walk in wisdom, and to walk according to His commandments.

There are several occasions in the NT where we are presented with a choice we must make. Will we walk in the flesh, or will we walk in the Spirit? Will we walk by sight, or will we walk by faith?

It is these final uses of walk that come into view in Joshua 9. The leaders and the people were supposed to be walking by faith, but they were walking by sight.

We often commit the same sin. Sadly, when we make decisions, too often we are swayed by what we see, by what we think, by how things appear to us instead of by allowing God to guide us. To walk by His Spirit is to allow Him to show us the way in which we are to walk.

As we walk through Joshua 9, my prayer is that we will learn to walk away from walking by sight and that we will learn to walk with God by walking by faith and by the Spirit. We walk by taking one step after another. With that in mind, I want us to look at and take three steps.

Step #1: Beware the Danger.

The word *beware* is a shortened version of the words "be aware." The Israelites failed to be aware of a danger they faced. Oh, they were aware of military threats. Those military threats are listed in the first two verses of Joshua 9. The neighboring peoples learned that the people called *Israelites* had taken the cities of Jericho and Ai. They knew they would be next unless they banded together. Accordingly, six different people groups banded together to fight against Joshua and Israel. I imagine they felt pretty good about the strength of their forces.

There was a seventh people group who wasn't quite so confident about their prospects of defeating the army of Israel. Instead of joining the alliance, they came up with a

different plan to assure their survival. Their plan, which we will look at in moment, worked because Israel and its leaders failed to detect their plan. It was an intelligence failure. They didn't know what they didn't know.

Let's read vv. 3-15. While the alliance of the six people groups relied on their strength, the Gibeonites relied on deception to ensure their survival. The Israelites simply didn't know where the Gibeonites lived. The available evidence told the people of God that the homeland of the Gibeonites must be far away, but they were deceived.

It occurs to me that if your adversary thinks he is stronger than you, he will fight you. If he thinks you may be stronger, he will try to deceive you.

I am just wondering out loud. Are there ever occasions when you have an encounter with someone or something that knows you are more powerful, so they resort to deception? Anybody or any business that tries to sell you something knows you have all the power. At the end of the sales process you can say, "Yes," or you can say, "No." It is completely up to you. Crooked sales people may try to deceive you. They may make promises about their product or their service that just aren't true, but if they can make you think they are true, they can deceive you into buying what they are selling.

Again, just wondering, do you think the government ever tries to deceive you? Living as we do in a country that is supposed to adhere to the rule of law, there are some things the government cannot do. We are supposed to have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Not wanting to be rebuffed by the courts for an abuse of power, some political leaders or even political parties may try to fool you by telling you things that are not so.

Do you think the media ever tries to deceive you? Do you think Hollywood ever tries to deceive you?

When you and I go fishing we practice deceit. We throw our line into the water. At the end of our line is what looks like a tasty treat to a fish—a wriggly worm, or if we are fishing for bass, a colorful lure that has a spinner to attract the fishes' attention (I'm over hear Mr. Bass). But that bait or that lure, whatever it is, conceals a hook. When the fish goes for the bait, he gets the hook, and you get dinner or at least the pleasure of knowing you fooled that poor, little fish. It was a contest of wits, and you won. Aren't you proud of yourself?

Our chief adversary, the Devil, knows that the God within us is stronger than he is. That is the testimony of God's word: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Knowing that, what does the Devil attempt to do? He attempts to deceive us. He peddles lies.

He throws a lure our direction. It catches our attention. We think, "O, that looks good. I want that?" But then we stop ourselves, "No, I really shouldn't."

Then, he plants a thought into our head, "What's the harm? Come on, live a little. You deserve this."

We say to ourselves, "Yeah, I do deserve that." We grab for the bait, and we get the hook."

The Gibeonites come to the Israelites and say, "We are no threat to you. We live so far away; you will never even see us." In fact, their city lay no more than 10 miles south and a little west of Ai, which just got destroyed.

Foolishly, the Israelites did nothing to check out their story. They didn't pray or

inquire of God as to what they should do. They saw the condition of the clothes and supplies, and assumed the Gibeonites were telling the truth.

Don't assume that because someone says something that it must be the truth. Don't believe everything you hear. Just because you read it on the Internet, that doesn't mean it is reliable. Don't live by sight. Live by faith. Go to God's word. Go to Him in prayer.

We read in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." If you try to negotiate your way in this dark world all on your own, you will stumble. Use God's word to navigate and find sure footing.

Our goal is to walk by faith rather than by sight, but sometimes we don't. If we are to reach our goal, our first step is to beware the danger.

Step #2: Manage the Problem.

Look with me at 9:16. Several days after making a covenant with the Gibeonites, who they thought lived far from them, the Israelites got some distressing intel. We are not told how they got it. Maybe they sent out a scout who returned with the news. Maybe some locals made a visit and they got to talking about recent events. Who knows? The important thing is not how they heard but what they heard, and what they heard is that the Gibeonites lived just down the road or just over the hill. "They are your neighbors," was the message.

The Israelites decided they had to find out just how close the Gibeonites lived. The Gibeonite population was housed in four towns. They sat in almost a rectangular fashion north and west of what would later be known as Jerusalem. At the time, the now capital of Israel was Jebus, a small Jebusite city.

It appears the whole camp made the trek. This was a mountainous region of Israel. The distance they needed to travel was about 15 miles, but due to the terrain and the number of people who traveled, it took several days to make the journey.

After the Israelites arrived, the Gibeonite leaders were asked an obvious question: "Why? Why did you deceive us?" That may be a burning question, but I don't think that was the most important question. A better question would be the one they should have asked of themselves: "Why? Why did we believe you? Why did we not check out what you said first? Why did we not consult God about this matter?"

Step #2 is Manage the Problem, and part of managing the problem means **take responsibility for the problems you create** when you walk by sight rather than by faith because when you walk by sight rather than by faith you are going to create problems for yourself.

Do you take responsibility for your missteps, misdeeds, miscalculations, and for your sin, or do you play the blame game? "It wasn't me; it was her; it was him; it was them. I'm a victim." Victimhood is all the rage today. Don't fall into that trap. Take responsibility. Own up to the part you played in creating the problems you face.

Another aspect of managing the problem is **don't compound the problem by continuing to act in the flesh**. There were those in the company of the Israelites who wanted to go ahead and exterminate the Gibeonites. At the end of v. 18 we read, "Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders." Apparently, there were those who were saying, "I can't believe our leaders made that stupid agreement. I don't care what

they said, let's go get them. Let's get rid of our problem.”

That seems to be what the people were thinking and saying because of what we find next. Look at vv. 19-20, 26.

You've heard it said that when you are in a hole you dug, quit digging! don't dig it deeper. That is what happens when we have a problem we created because we walked by sight, and then we try to solve that problem on our own, doing what we can do by our own efforts.

That brings us to the third part of managing the problem: **Keep the agreements you have made.** God takes a dim view of those who break the vows they have made. Conversely, God greatly blesses those who do what they said they would do even when there is a high price tag attached to keeping the promise they made. I want you to see what David wrote in Psalm 15. Look at 15:1-2, 4b, 5b.

In keeping with the vow that had been made, Joshua ordered that the people of Gibeon be spared, but there was a price the Gibeonites would have to pay for having deceived and lied to Joshua and the other leaders. Back in v. 8, they told Joshua, “We are your servants.” In v. 27 Joshua says that is what you are going to be—our servants. The people of Gibeon would be protected, but they would have to serve the people of Israel, but at least some of their work would be done for the altar of the LORD.

That is significant. They wanted to make peace with Israel because like Rahab, they believed the reports they had heard about the God of Israel. Just as Rahab became part of the community of Israel, the Gibeonites did as well. In the very next chapter, the Israelites defended the Gibeonites when they were attacked. In chapter 18 the city of Gibeon was assigned to the tribe of Benjamin. In chapter 21 we learn the Levites were allowed to live in Gibeon and work its pasturelands.

Many years later, the tabernacle was placed in Gibeon. And many years after that, the Gibeonites went with the people of Judah into captivity in Babylon and returned when many of the Jews returned to the land. In the Book of Nehemiah, the Gibeonites were mentioned among those who helped to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.

Joshua and the people kept their agreement, and good came from it.

Will you keep yours even when it is hard? If you will, good will come from it. This is true in marriage. This is true in all our relationships. That includes not only the home, but also our community, our places of work and the church, and wherever we have made promises, signed contracts, and given our word. When we keep our agreements, God blesses that. When we fail to do so, God notices, and God acts.

We read in 2 Samuel 21 that King Saul massacred many Gibeonites, and a three-year famine followed. After Saul died, it was left to King David to make things right.

While there is a cost associated to doing things right from the very beginning, that is not nearly as costly as having to make things right down the road.

So far, we have covered two steps. First, beware the danger. If you are believed to be the weaker party, the opposition will fight you. If you are known to be the stronger party, the opposition will attempt to deceive you. Either way, beware the danger.

Second, when you have messed up, manage the problem. You do that by taking responsibility, by not compounding your error, and by keeping your agreements.

There is a third step, but we will have to go beyond this chapter. Turn with me to Romans 8.

Step #3: Receive the Answer.

Beware the danger. Manage the problem. Receive the answer. The answer to walking by faith is to walk by the Spirit, and the secret to walking by the Spirit is found here in Romans 8. Let's read vv. 3-17.

To walk by the Spirit, we must receive the Spirit of God into our lives. The children of God are those who have the Spirit of God living within them. How do you become a child of God? We read in John 1:12, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

Listen also to what we read toward the last of John's gospel. Listen to John 20:30-31.

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

We receive Jesus by believing Jesus. Believe He is who He said He is. Believe He did what the Bible says He did. Receive Jesus as your Savior. Receive Jesus as your Lord.

When you receive Jesus, you become a child of God. When you become a child of God, He gives you His indwelling Spirit. When you receive the Spirit, He helps you to walk by the Spirit rather than by the flesh.

Pastor J.D. Greer claims there are two ways to keep a balloon in the air. The first is to keep smacking and hitting it. That is also how we keep Christians on the straight and narrow: "Stop doing that! Start doing this! Don't sleep in on Sunday! Give to missions! Share your faith!"

The second way to keep a balloon in the air is to fill it with helium. At that point, it floats on its own. No smacking is needed. Likewise, to keep a Christian going, let him, let her be filled with the Spirit of God. You won't have to poke and prod them. The Spirit of God will keep them soaring.

Trust Christ. Let His Spirit fill you. He will keep you walking by faith and keep you from walking by sight.