



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Joshua 9:1-27

Lesson 9

Fall 2020

"Unequally Yoked"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth, and good morning. Good to be with you all. We are in the Book of Joshua, and we are in chapter 9. These are rather long chapters, so rather than read the entire chapter, I'm going to read just part of this one, as I have been doing. I'm going to look at verses 1 through 16, which gives us the main force of the text that we will cover this morning. We're going to look at the entire chapter, 1 through 27, but I'll just read, beginning with verse 1 through verse 16.

Now you'll remember, Israel has fought two battles with the city of Ai, a very small town. But there was sin in the camp, because Achan stole treasures from the city of Jericho, which was "under the ban". It was all dedicated to God. It was like the first fruits of the conquest, and it was to be given to Him—and he stole. So that sin was exposed by the fact that they lost this battle to a very small town. But they came back. They dealt with the sin; they resumed the conquest; and they conquered the city of Ai. Then they went up to Shechem, which is in the center part of Israel, and rededicated themselves to the covenant—reading the Law on the two mountains of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Now we begin chapter 9 which begins,

<sup>1</sup> Now it came about when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country and in the lowland and on all the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, heard

of it, (*heard of the conquest of Ai, but maybe also I think context might indicate the defeat that Israel suffered at the hands of Ai*), <sup>2</sup> that they gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel.

<sup>3</sup> When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, <sup>4</sup> they also acted craftily and set out as envoys, and tool worn-out sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins worn-out and torn and mended, <sup>5</sup> and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* had become crumbled. <sup>6</sup> They went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us." <sup>7</sup> The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?" <sup>8</sup> But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" <sup>9</sup> They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the LORD your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, <sup>10</sup> and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroth. <sup>11</sup> So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; now them, make a covenant with us." ' <sup>12</sup> This our bread *was* warm *when* we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. <sup>13</sup> These wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey." <sup>14</sup> So the men *of Israel* took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore *an oath* to them.

<sup>16</sup> It came about at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land.

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this time together. It's always a great privilege to be with Your people on the LORD's day. And it's a blessing to be together because we can have true fellowship, that is, in the Word of God and in the Spirit of God, because we need the Spirit to guide us and direct us in our thinking and our understanding of the text we've read. The things we read and study are, on the surface at least, plain. And it's a bit of history that is an obvious story to us. But it has meaning for us that's every bit as important to us as it was to Joshua and the elders of Israel when they failed. We can do the same.

And so LORD, I pray that You'd teach us the lessons of this text, that You would alert us to the things we need to see in ourselves, and that You would encourage us through the things we study to become men and women, young and old alike, who look to You continually and seek to live for You and not this world. That we would seek to live lives that bring honor and glory to You. —Which is the best way for us to live; it's the healthy way to life; it's the way that's pleasing to You. —So bless us spiritually.

And LORD, we pray for our material needs. We live in strange days. We pray Your blessing upon us, physically, materially. We thank You that some of our members who have been sick have recovered from this virus. But we do pray for others, LORD, who are susceptible to it. They have a weak physical condition. I pray that You'd bless them, encourage them, strengthen them. LORD, we are reminded by such things of how dependent we are on You for everything: For our daily bread and certainly for the wisdom we need to live in this world, which is a deceitful world. And this passage we will look at this morning certainly illustrates that.

So LORD, we look to You to bless. We thank You for Your grace and mercy that has quickened us, given us life, and brought us here. We pray that we would be nourished by the things we study together; and that we bring glory to You; and that we

would be blessed richly by the time we spend at the end of this hour taking the LORD's supper, and reflecting upon Him—what He did for us and knowing that He's coming again. So LORD, bless our time now, we pray. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

The Bible gives us strict warnings about getting entangled with the world. In 1 John chapter 2, verse 15, for example, it says, "Do not love the world nor the things of the world." And James chapter 4, verse 4, is very strong; "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" '...a friend of the world is an enemy of God'. The point, of course, is not. 'Don't be kind or helpful to unbelievers' or 'withdraw from the world'. The point is, 'Don't get entangled in the world, adopt its spirit and ways, and seek its goals.'

Reminds me of some famous advice George Washington gave the government at the end of his second term as President, when he wrote his farewell address. He warned against permanent foreign alliances and long term treaties. Such entanglements result in unintended consequences, like, involvement in unnecessary wars on foreign fields. His language is severe. He said, "Other nations don't have our interests at heart. They practice the arts of seduction. And nations in such alliances are, in some degree, a slave."

Now if that's true of one nation in alliance with another, it's certainly true of the church—adopting the principles of the world, or a Christian becoming entangled with a non-Christian. Paul warned of that—of being "...unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2Cor 6:14). But it can happen. Happened to the best and the wisest of us, because like nations, the world around us does, to use Washington's words, practice the arts of seduction—which is deception.

Joshua, chapter 9, gives a good example of that very thing when good men, Godly men, got trapped in a treaty with unbelievers—because they were careless. It's a warning to us; that's the lesson.

But not the only lesson. Because often, where men fail, God blesses. That's the greatness of grace. It's Psalm 76, verse 10; God makes "the wrath of man" to praise Him. He brings blessing out of transgression.

Still, transgression is sin. It is wickedness and its effects are wide. We see that at the beginning of the chapter when the kings of Canaan made a treaty and gathered to fight Joshua. Now what happened? Earlier, at the beginning of chapter 5, the kings heard how Israel had crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan; and "their hearts melted". Now they're emboldened.

What happened is chapter 7. Achan sinned. And Ai, little Ai, insignificant Ai, defeated Israel. Now the vaunted Israelite army no longer seemed invulnerable, and the enemy was inspired to fight. That was the effect of one man's sin on the nation. It lost a battle; the Canaanite kings formed an alliance; and now, what might have been an easy conquest, would face stiff resistance.

Now I mentioned Psalms 76, and how God, in His sovereign wisdom causes the rebellion of man to serve His own purpose, and serve it to His praise. And this coalition of kings would result in the collapse of that coalition, and the colossal defeat of Canaan. But still, our failure only encourages the world in its rejection of our message, and its opposition to the Gospel. Here it strengthened resistance to Israel.

But not all were resolved to resist. Verse 3 states when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, well, we learned that they resolved to sue for peace. What we learn later is they had access to the revelation of the LORD. That seems to be the clear suggestion of, or statement of verse 24, later in the chapter. They had learned that the LORD had given Canaan to Israel, and all the inhabitants of the land were to be destroyed. They'd been told about Deuteronomy chapter 20, verses 16 through 18 that Israel was to "utterly destroy them...so that they may not teach you to do according to all the detestable things..." in their pagan religion and pagan culture.

Now that's the reason for the curse on Canaan. It's first of all their guilt—we've covered that to some degree; their heinous sin that only increased. And by now, 500

years after God had talked to Abraham about giving the land to his descendants, the iniquity of the Amorite was “full”. (Gen 15:16). And so their guilt is the fundamental reason for this judgment coming. But also sin is infectious and lethal. Israel would be contaminated by Canaanite culture and its ways, so they needed to remove it—excise it from the land. That was Moses' instruction.

That's a lesson for us: Not to destroy sinners, but destroy sin. That's Romans 8, verses 12 and 13. ‘Don't indulge the flesh, but by the Spirit, put to death the deeds of the body. If we do that we will live’, Paul said.

Now the Canaanites living in Gibeon heard this—and believed it—much like Rahab. Israel rolled up victories against powerful kings on the east side of the Jordan, and then on the west side defeated Jericho and Ai. They knew they couldn't beat this army and its God, so they decided to join them. Not by repentance, as Rahab had done, but by a ruse. They would trick Israel into making a treaty with them. They planned it out carefully and they went to elaborate lengths to carry it off.

Gibeon was about five miles northwest of Jerusalem, and not far from Ai. In fact, I visited the ruins of that site many years ago. There were still some things left of the ancient city of Gibeon. It was not far from Jerusalem and not far at all from the town of Ai. It wasn't a weak city, wasn't a small city. In fact, in chapter 10 it's described as, “a great city, like one of the royal cities”. (vs2). It was greater than Ai, and its “men were mighty”. Still, the fiery destruction of its neighbors set it on this course of action. They “acted craftily”, verse 4 says. They pretended to be a delegation from a foreign country far away, outside Canaan. And to give the lie the appearance of truth, they dressed the part. They wore old, patched sandals, carried worn-out, cracked wineskins, and bread that was dry and crumbling.

Verse 6, “They went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, ‘We have come from a far country. Now therefore, make a covenant with us.’ ” Again, it's clear from that that they had knowledge of Moses' instruction in Deuteronomy 20 about destroying the inhabitants of Canaan. In fact earlier in Deuteronomy 20:15, Moses said that cities not of Canaan, cities “far off” would be

treated differently. They would be given the opportunity to make peace and serve Israel. So the Gibeonites make sure to tell Joshua that they weren't from around these parts. They were from a place "far off", using the same word that Moses used, 'a far-off country'.

That's how the enemy works. He dissembles or deceives by wrapping himself in truth and all of the right words—all of the right language. And these Gibeonites came disguising themselves as qualifying for a peace treaty. Joshua and the men of Israel were taken in by it. Now they were initially skeptical, and they asked some questions, (Verse 7), "Perhaps you are living within our land," they said. "No," they answered, "We are your servants." (vs8).

Now that's interesting as well. Moses said, in Deuteronomy 20, that if people are qualified for this—if they were from 'far away' and accepted the terms of peace, then they would be Israel's servants. That's how they refer to themselves. So Joshua asked them who they were, and where they were from. They answered by repeating that they had come from a distant place, "a very far country". And they came for the best reason, "because of the fame of the LORD your God." Well that had to be appealing to Joshua and the leaders of Israel. They were there because of the LORD, out of devotion to Him. They were men of faith, or at least they were seekers. —That's good. They had heard what the LORD had done in Egypt and what he had done on the east side of the Jordan to the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og.

Now that was very clever, and showed how well thought-out their ruse was. They didn't mention Jericho or Ai, which happened too recently and would have shown that they had not traveled very far or for very long. They knew what to say. And to give tangible proof to support what they said, they pulled out their bread, which was old, showing their cracked wineskins, and worn out sandals, all proof of their long journey. It all made sense to Joshua and the leaders. And so in verse 15, we read that they, "made a covenant with them to let them live. And the leaders, *(of Israel)*, swore an oath".

Now it's hard not to have some admiration for the Gibeonites. They were clever, and they didn't side with the other Canaanites. And you feel a little sympathy for the

Israelites. They acted in good faith. They were deceived. Still, the Bible doesn't praise the Gibeonites, nor does it sympathize with the Israelites. Verse 14 makes it clear that Israel was without excuse. So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, that is they examined these things, the bread and the wineskins, and they did not ask for the counsel of the LORD. They made their decision according to what they could see, what they could touch. They handled the bread and it crumbled in their hands. So they used their own judgment. And based on their senses entered into a covenant.

What they didn't do is seek the LORD. And that had ...rather, they had the means to do that, I should say, with what's not mentioned here. But we know from the books of Moses, they had the Urim and the Thummim, which were instruments that the priests had, the high priest, and was used for a purpose such as this, to find out the LORD's will, gaining understanding, gaining divine direction. Well, they didn't appeal to that. They didn't feel they needed to, evidently. They were satisfied with the judgments that they had reached with their own senses—with their eyes and with their hands, seeing and touching. It seemed to confirm all that they needed. And so they didn't think they needed to appeal to the LORD, they didn't need to seek His guidance in that way. Or perhaps they just didn't think to do it.

There are basically two types of sin. You have heard this, I'm sure. There are sins of commission and sins of omission. Doing something that we shouldn't do, which is commission—committing a sin. And then not doing something that we should do—omitting it. Sins of omission. Well, whatever one this was, it was a serious lapse in judgment, similar to the one that occurred before the first battle of Ai, when they didn't seek the LORD's guidance.

Now here they were more circumspect. They looked into it more than they did in that previous error. They'd learned something, but still they made the mistake of following their senses, following their own judgment. The city was small, thinking of Ai, when they were dealing with that—it would be easy to defeat. They didn't need to look to the LORD. And here, too, it all seemed so obvious, with all these provisions that they had and they could examine.

Now the cases between the two, Ai and Gibeon, were different. One was a decision regarding war; the other was a decision about peace. But with both, there was something secret that was hidden from them, which only the LORD could reveal. That's why we must never trust in ourselves. Never trust our senses and judgment, and must always be people of prayer, looking to the LORD to give us wisdom and guidance, and not lean on our own understanding.

Well that's the counsel we have from the Proverbs. Proverbs chapter 3, verses 5 and 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 your path straight." That describes a way of life, not sporadic moments of seeking God's will. It is a life of study and prayer, of walking by the Spirit, of obedience. It is a careful life, not a careless life. It is a way of life. As we study, He gives understanding, and He imparts wisdom through that understanding. And so, as we gain the wisdom of God through the study of His Word, and through fellowship with Him in prayer, we know what to do in various circumstances. And He makes our path straight by His providence.

Now Joshua and the leaders were Godly men. They are earnest believers. And we see that in this passage, which really makes the warning of it all the more important for us. These were earnest believers, Godly men, but they had a lapse. And it happens with the best. They were not trusting in the LORD. They were not seeking His counsel. They didn't feel that they needed to, evidently, or they just neglected to. And the result was a grave mistake.

So we ask ourselves, how do such things happen? How did it happen with them, exactly. Now I suppose there are different reasons for that, but we ask that of ourselves individually. We can ask that of a church. How does it become aligned with people and positions that are contrary to their beliefs and biblical practice? It's another way of saying, how did we become worldly?

It's all very subtle. We don't embrace Christ and begin living for Him, growing in our faith, and then wake up one morning and decide, "You know, I think I'll be friends with the world." It happens slowly; as I said, subtly. We take our eyes off Christ and

begin to drift. The world looks good. It has an appeal. It seems real. It's what we can have now. We don't have to wait.

The world really exerts a kind of artful pressure on us that is constant, and eventually insinuates itself into our minds. It's what Paul warns of in Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, about being "conformed to this world". I know Mark was speaking along these same lines in a previous hour, how it's so hard to not keep our minds on the things of daily life around us and get caught up in that. We're to look for the LORD's return, be praying for that. Do we pray for that? He asked that question, and I have asked that question of myself. Oftentimes, no, that's not what my mind is on. It's on the things of this world, the daily things.

And the world, let's face it, is attractive. It's pretty neat. It's cool. It's what I wanted, when I was 17, to be Steve McQueen, the king of cool. *[Laughter]* Sailing over barbed wire on a motorcycle, driving fast sports cars. That's what I wanted. I didn't know about the 'fruit of the Spirit' back then. That wasn't what I was striving for. It was for other things. It was to have that intangible something.

Well, we grow out of that into something more sophisticated with age. But it's really all the same. And it is all a mirage. It's all about self-interest and self-advancement for something that is not real. It's what Satan offered Jesus when he took Him up on the mountaintop and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, showed them to Him in all of its splendor. And he said, "It's Yours. Just worship me." It was a compromise, and Christ saw through it and rejected it. It was a temptation to Him, though. How much, it's hard for us to say. But I can say this, it was a great temptation. And it was Satan at his most artful. And he presented this glorious world to Christ, and said, "You can have it all right now." He rejected it. He saw through it.

B. B. Warfield wrote about this in his article, *Imitating the Incarnation*; "Of self-assertion, of conquest", as he called it, "in gaining a place for ourselves of a position. Conquest of the admiration of man...", he wrote, "...of the fierce battle of men and women for leading parts in the farce of social display." That's well put. "The farce of

social display." That's the world. That's what people are after, what it offers. But what it offers is a farce, it's a charade, but a very convincing one, even for the born again.

The only way to counter the appeal of the world is with something more appealing. And that, for the believer, is Jesus Christ. It's Him in His perfection as the Savior, as the God-Man; He is altogether glorious. Now, that takes time to cultivate that. But that's what we must be doing. It is a lifelong thing that we do, as we seek to know Him and daily spend time with Him, studying Him, praying to Him—to our Triune God. And that cultivates this relationship.

And so, as we have that relationship, we must keep our eyes on Him. That's how we live the life. That's what the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 12, verses 1 and 2. That's how we run the race of faith, which is, for us, the race of life. It's how we live successfully in this world, keeping our eyes on Jesus, "...the author and perfecter of faith..." And as we keep our eyes on Him, we learn more about Him, and we grow in our appreciation for Him. And as that fills our hearts and that fills our mind, these other things become less significant to us. We see through it. So we have to fill our minds with Him and His Word. We stumble when we don't. We become friends with the world, compromise our behavior, or the church compromises its message. It's dangerous. We live in a dangerous world.

Israel put itself in that position. It made an unholy alliance. It was a sin of omission. They neglected to consult the LORD. They trusted their senses, themselves, and they were duped. They were genuinely deceived. As I said, it happens.

But the deception was not for long. It never is. Proverbs 12, verse 19 says that "...a lying tongue is only for a moment." It becomes known. And within three days, Israel learned the truth. People became angry with their leaders, and they grumbled against them because they'd made a covenant with the enemy. They'd let the enemy in. They knew that they were now threatened. They were weakened as a nation, and they wanted to go march on Gibeon and kill all the people there.

But the leaders were determined to let the Gibeonites live, because of the oath they had sworn. Verses 19&20, "But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, 'We

have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. This we will do to them, even let them live, so that wrath will not be upon us for the oath which we swore to them.' " They understood, admirably and correctly, that a vow is important. It is binding.

A man's word should be good for something—in business and in marriage. And I would say, most importantly in marriage. When a couple is joined in marriage, they make a vow. They make a vow to one another; and they make that vow also to God. Sometimes the match is not a good one. Maybe it's based on personalities or physical attraction, and wasn't spiritually grounded. Still, the couple entered into marriage, and the vow is sacred. Israel failed badly. But to their credit, the leaders understood the importance of an oath. They knew that if they violated it, they would dishonor God and they would bring down His wrath on themselves.

That actually happened 400 years later when Saul violated the agreement with the Gibeonites. And as punishment, men of his house were put to death. This generation, Joshua and the leaders of Israel, was a godly generation; unlike their parents who grumbled in the desert and wanted to forsake what they had been given by God and go back to Egypt. No, this was a faithful generation. But they failed, as the best of people do. Nevertheless, they were determined not to add to their sin.

So, they let the Gibeonites live. But they also applied the Law to them. Deuteronomy 20, verse 11, which the Gibeonites evidently knew, stated that 'those who make peace will become Israel's servants. They will become forced labor.' Joshua made them servants. "You are cursed", he said, "and you shall never cease being slaves." (vs23). For the rest of their days they would be wood cutters and water carriers for Israel at the tabernacle.

The Gibeonites didn't protest like Cain who whined, "My punishment is too great to bear!" They acknowledged their guilt, and they accepted the service as just. They were realists, and they had spiritual insight. They knew God had given Israel the land. Therefore, they said, "...we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing." (vs24). But they added, in verse 25, "Now behold, we are in your hands; do

as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us." And the chapter concludes, "Thus he did to them, and delivered them from the hands of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them. But Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place which He would choose." (vs26&27).

The main lesson of chapter 9 is one of caution. —Be vigilant. It's an exhortation found throughout the Bible. In 1 Peter 5, verse 8, Peter writes, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Probably nothing in the Bible other than the cross of Christ seems more foolish to modern man than the notion of a personal devil, Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub. And that's just the way he wants it, living under the radar, undetected. What he does is infiltrate the church and compromise the Gospel by means of deception, getting into an alliance with the church. Paul warns of that in 2 Corinthians 11, of "false apostles" and "deceitful workers". He wrote, "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." (vs14). A seeker. Someone who's here because of the LORD. "Be sober of spirit," Peter said. Be on the alert.

Well Joshua was sober after Ai, but still got fooled. That's a warning to us. I don't think they were casual about sin at this point. Nevertheless, these men were clever, and they were fooled. That's how effective the enemy is. It's the reason Jesus said in Matthew 10, verse 16, "Be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves." Christians, of all people, should understand the nature of this fallen world, understand the wiles of the devil, and deceitfulness of the human heart. We need to know that. We need to understand human nature and the nature of the world, and be wise. In fact, the LORD exposed our failure in Luke chapter 16, verse 8 when He said, "...the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light." They understand the way the world works better than we do.

Well, the way to remedy that, the way to get wisdom is to know God's Word. Go back, what I said earlier, about filling our minds with Christ and who He is and what He's

done, with all of the Word of God, the Scriptures, God's revelation. Israel failed a second time to look to the LORD and seek His guidance. We have that, from the Scriptures. We have it from the Bible and the Holy Spirit, who is our interpreter.

All that being said, (and the warnings here are very pointed and insightful and serious), still, all of that being said, there's some encouragement here, as well—at least by implication. The seriousness with which the leaders of Israel took their oath showed their devotion to the LORD, (as I pointed out), because they knew He takes His promises seriously—that they are inviolable. They understood that they must also take their oaths and their promises seriously. But seeing that in them as a reflection of their understanding of the LORD, is very significant.

Francis Shaeffer made this observation. If God will not tolerate the breaking of an oath made in His name, how much more will He never break His own oath and covenant made to us on the basis of His shed blood and infinite value of Jesus Christ. And that reminds us that we are secure in Christ, even when we fail. We are secure in Christ. The author of Hebrews gave that assurance in Hebrews, chapter 6, verses 13 through 20 where he said, 'God made promises'; "interposed by an oath"; and he adds, "...it is impossible for God to lie..." He can't break His promises. He can't break His oath. He can't violate it.

We fail in the Christian life. We stumble and sin and have to bear the consequences of that. Both Israel and the Gibeonites suffered consequences for what happened. Nevertheless, God is always with us, like a father holding his child's hand when the child's learning to walk. You parents, no doubt did that. We all did that with our children. We take their hand, and we'd walk with them, and they're just learning to get their balance, and they'd stumble, and we'd hold them and raise them up. Well, that's what the LORD does with us. He walks with us constantly. We stumble, we fall, He's patient. He lifts us up. He continues on with us, teaching us, helping us to walk even more surely and correctly. That's the Christian life.

That's the LORD teaching us to walk, training us in this Christian life, and never forsaking us because He is bound by oath to His elect. —And He will never let them go.

His grace is greater than our sin. In fact, Paul said, "...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.", (Rom 5:20).

And it did with those Gibeonites. They were made to work in the tabernacle. Now what greater blessing could be given to pagans than that? To see the altar and sacrifices, to be in the light of God's worship in truth. This was better than had they been left alone, and left to flourish as pagans in Gibeon without any interference from Joshua and the army of Israel. To be servants of Israel and to be in that place was a rich blessing.

When the nation was divided up, the city of Gibeon was given to the line of Aaron. 400 years later, David put the tabernacle there. One of David's mighty men was a Gibeonite, Ishmaiah. (1Ch 12:4). And it was at Gibeon that Solomon had his famous dream, when he asked for wisdom at the beginning of his reign, 1 Kings, chapter 3. Some of the Gibeonites are listed in the Book of Nehemiah. It seems the Gibeonites were fully assimilated among the Jews, like Rahab was. Converts. And perhaps a picture of the Gentiles by grace being grafted into Israel's olive tree in Romans 11, verse 17.

Sin has consequences. The Gibeonites had to labor in a menial task all their lives. But where God forgives, He turns a curse into a blessing. He did that with the Gibeonites, and does that with all who trust in Him, by trusting in Christ. He begins where we are. He takes sinful, fallen people and recreates them. He heals the brokenhearted. He makes us useful for Him.

That's the first product of regeneration, of being born again, we become new creatures in Christ. Then we begin the process of sanctification. It happens immediately with regeneration, of being conformed to the image of Christ. Even when we stumble, the LORD holds onto us, holds our hand, picks us up. And through obedience, He leads us from strength to strength, from glory to glory, until we reach the goal. And we will all reach the goal. That's sovereign grace. That's the grace of our LORD.

If you've not experienced that, it's offered in the Gospel, the Good News of eternal life through faith in Christ, God's Son and our Savior. He died to remove our sins.

We have that forgiveness. We have it completely. We have it fully. We have it at the moment of faith. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. If you've not believed in Him trust in Him, come to Him. He receives all who do, and He will transform you, and be with you until you enter into glory itself. May God help all of us to take courage in that and live a faithful life.

Let's bow in a word of prayer, and I'll give thanks for the bread and the wine that we will take.

Father, we thank You for Your goodness to us. We see it in our lives continually. Even when we don't see it, it's present reality. We are in Christ. We are never outside of Christ. And Your care for us is constant. Even when we stumble and fall, You are with us, and You raise us up, and You deal with us, and enable us to recover and progress. And we can even see ourselves in these Gibeonites. Really, in the end of it all, we're greatly blessed. And You took a ruse and You turned it into repentance in the lives of many of them, and brought them, it would seem, to Yourself and blessed them greatly. Now that's us, Father. We are undeserving, but You blessed us through Your grace, which brought us to saving a knowledge of Christ.

And now, LORD, as we turn our attention to this Supper, we pray that You would prepare our hearts for that and bless us as we take it. We thank You for Christ and what He did for us; for His death on our behalf, His great sacrifice for our sin. It's in His name we pray. Amen.

*(End of Audio)*