

Character!

Second in Command: Life of Joshua – Part VI

Joshua 9:16-12:24

Introduction

In 1924, Liberty performed a rather interesting survey. They selected, at random, one hundred people and sent a letter to them. Enclosed in that letter, was a one dollar bill. The letter explained that as a result of adjusting an error these people had made, they were owed one dollar. Twenty-seven people returned the dollar bill, saying that Liberty had made the mistake and not them. In 1971, Liberty repeated the survey. This time, thirteen of the recipients returned the one dollar bill. If these statistics remained constant and the survey were conducted in 1991, ninety-five people would pocket the buck and say, “How dumb can Liberty be? I’ll just keep it.”

When you were growing up, you probably heard a lot about something called “character”. Everyone was supposed to have it, but everyone did not. Those who did not were referred to as “characters”.

Webster defines character as, “moral uprightness; freedom from corruption; honesty.”

Ted Engstrom defines the sister word “integrity” as, “doing what you said you would do”. That is character.

A gentleman in our church told me of something that happened at his business recently. One of his clients placed a very large order quite unexpectedly. The order was twice as large as any the client had previously requested. It was an emergency situation and they needed the supplies by the next afternoon. This businessman knew he could not get the supplies for at least two, or possibly three, days. If he signed

the contract, he knew the client would just have to wait, but he would get the job. Instead, he told them to call his competitor, as they might have it on hand.

That is what is called “character”. It is not promising something that you cannot produce; it is fulfilling everything that you said you would do.

Displaying character may be something small, like taking your turn in the carpool when you wish you had never signed on, or keeping an appointment with a person that you do not particularly like, or making needed phone calls in the afternoon when you are already bone tired. It may be something very significant, like fulfilling the promise to your child to take them fishing when you said you would, or fulfilling a ministry responsibility after you have realized how difficult it is going to be to accomplish, or showing up when you said you would show up. It may be something as important as remaining married to the person you married, when they turned out differently than you expected.

In our study today, in the book of Joshua, we find Joshua in a pickle involving his character. He has just been fooled by an Oscar winning performance by the Gibeonites. They came to the Israelite camp wearing old clothes and carrying worn out wineskins. They had to prove to Joshua that they were from a far off country. God had told Moses that those who lived in a far off country would be allowed to live in a servitude role. So, the Gibeonites had to prove to Joshua that they lived more than the twenty minutes away that they did. They appeared with their worn out clothes and said, “Look, Joshua, our sandals are

worn out, our wineskins are old and patched, and our clothing is worn out. We are from a far off country.”

Joshua bought the lies, as we learned in our last discussion, because he did not go to God first. Now, turn your attention to Joshua 9 and notice the way Joshua reacts when he learns the truth.

Joshua – Keeping a Promise!

Let us begin by looking at Joshua 9:15, as a review. Joshua made a promise to the Gibeonites.

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.

Continue to Joshua 9:16.

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.

This tells us that in three days, the Israelites discovered these Gibeonites lived twenty minutes away. They thought they lived in a far off country.

I can imagine, after the peace treaty was signed, that the Gibeonites went around the corner to their home, laughing and swatting each other on the back, saying, “Oh, what a dumb leader that Joshua is. How gullible those Israelites are.”

Now what is Joshua going to do when he discovers that his promise was made to people who live twenty minutes away? That is the point we want to note.

We are told what the congregation of Israel wanted to do in Joshua 9:18.

The sons of Israel did not strike them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord the God of Israel. And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders.

The Israelites want to strike them. Joshua is now in the middle. The Israelites hate him and the Gibeonites have made a fool of him. Skip to Joshua 9:26 and note this.

Thus he did to them, and delivered them from the hands of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them.

In other words, Joshua kept his promise.

Joshua responded with unusual character to this situation. He knew that doing something wrong, in

addition to the wrong he had already done, would never create a right. As you may have rightly been told, “Two wrongs don’t make a right.”

Yahweh – Revealing His Power!

Today, I want to use this passage to demonstrate an important point to you. Because Joshua responds with honesty and with character, he creates, in a sense, the circumstances in which God will respond and reveal His character through Joshua’s life. God will do this in very unusual ways. Let me give two.

1. First, God will use this alliance to bring swift and unexpected victory.

Look at Joshua 10:1-4.

Now it came about when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai, and had utterly destroyed it (just as he had done to Jericho and its king . . .), and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were within their land,

that he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty.

Therefore Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent word to Hoham king of Hebron and to Piram king of Jarmuth and to Japhia king of Lachish and to Debir king of Eglon, saying,

“Come up to me and help me, and let us attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the sons of Israel.”

In other words, Gibeon, a mighty city, has committed a traitorous act. Being a traitor can be contagious, causing others to surrender and wave the white flag. So, this king thinks, “If this strong, valiant city has fallen, then we had better stamp them out before smaller city-states catch on and lay down their arms to the Israelites.”

So these kings intend to destroy Gibeon, a city that used to be their friend.

Look at Joshua 10:5-6. The Gibeonites, who just fooled Joshua, ask for help.

So the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and

went up, they with all their armies, and camped by Gibeon and fought against it.

Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, “Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us.”

Now stop at this point and put yourself in Joshua’s place. You could easily think, “This is a blessing; this is an answer to a prayer that I never prayed! Why not just sit back and let the Canaanites wipe out the Canaanites? We made that promise, but surely the Lord will understand. And look, all of the five kings have come against them – that must be God at work. Thank you, God, You move in mysterious ways.”

If Joshua had acted according to these thoughts, the whole congregation of Israel would probably have patted him on the back and, once again, he would have been their hero. However, Joshua kept the promise that he made. He responded in a way that we might have rationalized ourselves out of.

What does Joshua do? He mounts up and Joshua 9:9 tells us,

So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal.

In other words, Joshua responded with character because Joshua was willing to keep his promise.

Now God brings about victory over five kings, but in an unusual way. Note Joshua 9:10-11.

And the Lord confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

As they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.

This idea might be a little strong for many people and is one, I think, the church has abandoned – that God is a warrior who fights for His people. We have the idea that we are doing all the fighting and it is all up to us; we must be strong. My friend, God is

powerful and is allowing His character to be revealed through a man and his nation who responded in character and fought.

There is God, in heaven, throwing stones at the enemies of His people. This is not the Jesus people know – the Jesus people know in this world, is One that they have a perception of as being a pathetically weak figure who smells like hand lotion or something. He is a warrior and He is up in heaven throwing stones to fight for His people because they responded with character. It is a very interesting picture.

Now there are times in our lives when we observe people responding with character and admire it. God, I think, wants to teach us how to respond in like fashion.

Many of us have raised children. Sometimes I tell stories about mine and you can probably identify because you have gone through the same thing. I experienced an expression of great character and commitment from one of my five year old boys. It was very convicting.

We went to the doctor and if you have listened to me long enough, you know how I feel about doctors. It is not that I have anything against them, the problem is what they do. I do not really like to go to their offices, but my son had been attacked by strep. He was flushed, his cheeks were red, he had a high temperature, and he was hot and weak. When I got home after work, Marsha had made an appointment for him with the doctor. So I took him to the pediatrician’s office.

We were sitting in the waiting room and I was more nervous than he was. Finally, the nurse came and announced the name. I usually get clammy hands when they say, “Mr. Davey.” We got up and walked into a room that was all tile and everything echoed. We sat there and waited for the nurse. She arrived, looked him over, and said, “We need to check to make sure it is strep. I have to take some samples from his throat.”

She told him, “Open up.” He opened up and she “gouged,” that is my word, but she gouged down in his throat. He gagged and I was over there gagging with him. She did it twice and I felt so bad for him and kind of identified.

She left and we were sitting there, so I said, “Why don’t you come sit on my lap.”

So he sat on my lap, just wiped out, and I whistled a little, softly. He said, “Dad, let’s sing.”

I asked, "What do you want to sing?"

He answered, "Let's sing, 'Hallelujah.'"

I thought, "Here? This is a doctor's office! You don't sing 'Hallelujah.'"

I did not tell him that, I just thought that. So we sang "Hallelujah". It echoed and the door was open. We got to the end of that verse and he said, "Let's sing another verse."

I asked, "What do you want to sing?"

He replied, "Let's sing, 'I Love Jesus.'"

Now I am standing in front of strangers preaching, and I am not blinking an eyelash at saying what I believe. I also talk to total strangers about Jesus Christ. At that particular moment, however, do you know what went through my mind? I will admit that I thought, "How can I shut that door without my son knowing?" Since he was in my lap, I could not get over to the door and shut it. So there we sat, singing, "I love Jesus." People were walking back and forth and it was echoing all over the place. I said, "Lord, I've got the picture; I've learned."

What an evidence this was, in a sense, of my son's innocence, yet for him, deep character.

When we see character evidenced in the life of a nation, it is interesting to see the way God responds. He will give, basically, two revelations of Himself.

- The first revelation is that God is the warrior who fights for the faithful.
- The second revelation is that God is the Creator who controls His creation.

I love the next passage. Look at Joshua 9:12.

Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, and O moon in the valley of Aijalon."

The nation Israel can hear Joshua praying a public prayer. Continue to Joshua 9:13.

So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies.

Joshua is in the midst of defeating five kingdoms, which he knows is an unusual evidence of God's power. It is getting dark and he needs more daylight to finish this "mopping up". He has the audacity to ask God to give him more daylight. God, by the way, has never answered that prayer affirmatively when I

have prayed it! Basically, Joshua is saying, "I need about twelve more hours of daylight."

God gives it.

Now I do not normally take time to answer the critics because the critics are usually not sitting in church on Sunday morning. I will address this issue, however, because you may be confronted with this at your place of work.

This is the passage that all the critics love to run to. They would say, "Inspired? Couldn't be. How unscientific to say, 'O sun, stand still'. We know that the sun doesn't stand still, or actually, that it doesn't move. We know the earth moves around the sun and, as it moves, it rotates, which gives us a twenty-four hour day and night, or twelve hour cycles. We know that's how it operates. The sun is, basically, in the center. So, for Joshua to say, 'O sun, stand still,' is a pretty big 'boo-boo' in the scriptures. You can't get around that one."

I would listen to the same critics when they are looking at a beautiful scene that God is painting at the end of a day. What would they say? They would say, "Isn't the sunset beautiful?"

"The sun what?"

"Have you noticed, when the sun goes down, the beautiful colors?"

"The sun goes where?"

This is our perspective and this is the way we talk about it. In fact, the television weather channel will give the hour and minute of sunset and the hour and minute of sunrise. Is that unscientific? Yes, but that is the way we talk.

This is the way Joshua was talking, in the language of his day, and we still talk that way today. He is, in effect, saying, "God, I need a longer day, so I can finish this job."

It is interesting that the *Dallas Morning News*, of August 14, 1972, reported an incident that was discovered by scientists. There was an explosion on the sun's surface that created a slower rotation of the earth, making a very long day.

Whether that event happened or not, is God powerful enough to order the creation? If the world would just believe what occurred in Genesis 1, they would have no trouble believing anything else in the Bible. That, however, is the stumbling block.

Now look at the last part of Joshua 10:13. The book of Jasher that is mentioned, by the way, is a

collection of great events in Israel's history. It is mentioned in the book of II Samuel, as well.

Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day.

Can we explain this? No. Can we figure this out? No. There are many ways to try to explain it away, however. My research uncovered about twenty-one different ways to explain it away. But if God is big enough to create, He is big enough to order.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was a tremendous expositor of God's Word, influenced his young protégé, by the name of Howard Hendricks. Howard Hendricks has influenced men that you have probably heard speak or have read some of their books; such as, Chuck Swindoll and Charles Stanley. Barnhouse was a very unique illustrator. On one occasion, he returned to Princeton Seminary to preach to the student body, and the faculty also appeared. Robert Dick Wilson, a believer and an Old Testament scholar at the seminary, came to listen.

After the sermon, Wilson said to Barnhouse, "I just come, one time, to hear the boys who have sat under me and have graduated. I want to know if they have a little God or a big God. Those who have a little God have a lot of trouble with God – He can't do miracles; He can't take care of inspiration or preservation; He has difficulty ordering the world. Those who have a big God have no trouble with God – He speaks and it is done; He commands and it is accomplished. Mr. Barnhouse, you have a very big God."

For those who have a big God, this passage does not even cause a hiccup.

There is one more thing that I want to note about this miracle before going on. It concerns the sun and moon. This is interesting because in the Canaanite pagan religion, two of their chief deities are none other than the sun and the moon. So, by performing this miracle, God sent a message that said, in effect, "I am more powerful than your chief gods. I can control them."

2. The second thing that God will do because of Joshua's character is, not only allow Joshua to experience unexpected victory, but use the alliance to influence the Gibeonites for His glory.

Go back to Joshua 9:27 and notice as Joshua places the Gibeonites into service.

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.

Where did Joshua assign the Gibeonites to serve? The altar. In other words, "If you're going to serve, you're going to hew wood for the altar and you're going to bring water and you're going to come many times a day."

Joshua, in effect, says, "I am going to expose you to the worship of Yahweh."

What happened as a result of this? When we put the pieces together in the Old Testament, we discover something fascinating. The Gibeonites came to follow Yahweh themselves.

Let me give some of the clues. I will briefly list them.

- When the Jews, in later years, followed after false gods, the Gibeonites refused to follow.
- When the land was divided, they chose Gibeon as the city where the altar was to be placed and where Aaron and the priests were to reside; making it a special, sacred city.
- Four hundred years after the land was divided, David built the tabernacle in Gibeon.
- About five hundred years before Christ, in the time of Zerubbabel, the genealogies talk about those who returned to Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian exile, and the Gibeonites are listed as being followers of God returning to Jerusalem.
- One of the most interesting clues that I uncovered was the fact that, when Nehemiah went back to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, the Gibeonites volunteered to go back to help him rebuild the walls.

The Gibeonites had exposure to worship and exposure to a man who responded in a way that probably surprised them. Joshua could have left them to hang; he could have said, "God, thank you for bringing along these five kings to wipe out an embarrassing situation."

Instead, the Gibeonites saw Joshua, and his men, come to their rescue. I have no doubt that that amazed them. An exposure to the power and the

might of God, a personal God, eventually worked in the Gibeonites and brought them to faith in Him as well.

My friend, you may be surrounded by Gibeonites. You probably work with a few. You may be married to one. Your son or daughter might be a Gibeonite. You may live next door to one. Oh, if we could keep

our testimonies uncluttered and clear to reveal character, we could then allow the circumstances in which God could reveal His character to us and through us. Then, the Gibeonites around us might honor Him too. How do the Gibeonites in your world view you?

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/24/1991 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 1991 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.