



BE SMART

Thinking back to when Josh and Abi were younger, there are things that stand out. TV shows, silly songs, reading at bedtime. Not just the time spent with them, but the stories themselves. *Charlie and Lola*, *Hairy McLary*, and most of all, *The Gruffalo*. And what I love about *The Gruffalo*, apart from the memorable poetry and the freaky artwork, is the set-up. It's basically a lesson in the need for discernment – or how to lie your way out of trouble.

The chapter of Joshua that we're going to look at this morning is a lot like the story of *The Gruffalo*. It's a lesson in the need for discernment –

But maybe not in the way we might think, on first reading.

Joshua 9

The Gibeonites are aware that the Israelites are out to capture the Land of Canaan, so they pretend to have come from a far-off land with the intention of making a treaty. In reality, they come from 5 miles up the road and are looking to save their skins. And because the Israelites fail to 'seek the counsel of the LORD,' they get hoodwinked and make a pledge of mutual protection.

And it's a great lesson on the need to pray about everything, isn't it? To keep our spiritual wits about us, to live by faith not by sight, and to seek the LORD's will on absolutely everything – yes?

Except ... I'm not so sure that's what the chapter is really all about.

Yes, those things are important – really important. But that's not the main point of this chapter.

Why do I say that? 3 reasons:

- The chapter begins in a different place – in the Canaanite camp rather than the Israelite one.
- The chapter ends with the Gibeonites 'recruited' by the Israelites, to assist the Levites in the tabernacle.
- In ch10 the Israelites defend the Gibeonites against the Canaanites – and God grants them victory.

So, what is this chapter about? It's about the kind of attitude you need to go from being outside of God's kingdom to inside of it.

What do we need? What does it take?

1) It takes a stroke of genius. Unlike the Israelites, the Gibeonites are savvy. In the NIV vs4 says: "they resorted to a ruse." The AV translates it: "They acted wilily." In Hebrew the word for 'wilily' is *b'ar'mah*, which literally means 'slyly' or 'with cunning.' Now we might think of 'cunning' in a negative sense, but that's not necessarily the way the Bible looks at it. E.g. Proverbs 1:4: "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, King of Israel ... to give prudence (*'armah*) to the simple."

Jesus Himself said, "Be as cunning as snakes and as innocent as doves."

The Gibeonites are sensible enough to recognise that they're not just taking on the *people* of Israel – they're taking on the *God* of Israel. And this God is no ordinary god – this is a God who can part seas and melt mountains. This is a God who cannot be beaten. There's only one thing you can do in the presence of such a God – surrender. And that's what they do.

So, you can say "those Gibeonites, they were dishonest and devious and dodgy." But they were also wise enough to recognise what needed to be done.

And did it.

2) It takes a step of faith. The Gibeonites risk almost everything. What do they risk?

- Being cut off from the rest of Canaanite society.
- Being cut off by Israel when they find out the truth!

But do you know what the biggest risk of all was? That God Himself would blow the whistle on them. They must have believed that this God would have been aware of what they were up to, even if the Israelites weren't. So, they were taking a gamble – albeit a calculated one. They were bargaining on the grace and mercy of God.

And that's what biblical faith looks like.

Kellie made the point once that faith is spelled R.I.S.K. – because without it, faith is nothing more than a theory, an intellectual assent, a mere hypothesis.

The Gibeonites recognised the goodness of the God of Israel, and Jesus calls us to do the same: to trust in Him rather than ourselves; to trust in what He says about the meaning of life rather than what others have to say about it; to trust in His death and resurrection rather than our own attempts at righteousness.

It's risk, risk, risk, all the way. And that's the kind of attitude God is looking for.

3) It takes a shift of allegiance. The Canaanites in this chapter are faced with a choice: between life and death. The other city-states in the immediate vicinity decide to club together and prepare for war, i.e. they choose death. The Gibeonites, on the other hand, decide to swap sides, just as Rahab did. They choose *life*.

When it comes to Jesus, there are 2 options available to us: we either reject Him; or we accept Him. And that's it. Unless we're in a position where we've never heard the Gospel (in which case God judges us on the basis of what do we know about Him), we are either for Him or against Him. As church we might want to be as inclusive as we can be, remembering "whoever comes to Me I will never drive away" (John 6:37). But even a casual reading of the Gospels will tell you that Jesus made a distinction between those who follow Him and those who don't. There is no neutral territory, no buffer zone, no 'foot in both camps,' no 'Jesus was a great teacher.' We either belong to Him, as the Gibeonites do here – or we don't.

The wisest decision we can ever make is to become a Christian – to give our life to Jesus.

It's His, anyway.

Outside-In

Just in case you don't buy my take on this chapter, consider what happened to the Gibeonites. If you trace their story through the rest of the OT, there is not one single mention of them having any kind of negative influence, anywhere. They become a part of the fabric of Israelite worship; King Saul is cursed when he tries to destroy them; King David sings that he would rather be one of them; and when the Israelites return from exile, the Gibeonites help to rebuild Jerusalem! Wow!

The lesson is that God's grace can trump everything else. The folly of the Israelites; the fakery of the Gibeonites, and all the ways we goof up, too. Some people worry that their testimonies are too messy or not clear-cut enough.

The question is: are we desperate to be right with Jesus? Now?

That's what matters, most.