

Inquire of the Lord

Joshua 9

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In Joshua chapter 9, we continue following Joshua and Israel during their early days in the Promised Land. Already God had helped them miraculously cross the Jordan River. God had helped them to defeat the feared walled city of Jericho. Once their sin was removed from the camp, God helped them defeat the small city of Ai.

When the surrounding kings heard of all that God was doing for Israel, they planned to come together to fight against Israel. This included all of the surrounding cities, except for one. The leaders of Gibeon came up with another plan.

They dressed several men like they had traveled from a distant land. With dry, moldy bread in their bags, burst wineskins and worn out clothes, they arrived at the camp of Israel. They told of how they had traveled from far away, how they had heard of the works of Yahweh, and how they wanted to make a covenant, a peace treaty, with Israel. At first, the leaders of Israel were suspicious. What if they were really from a city in Canaan? After hearing their story and seeing how they looked, they finally agreed to make a covenant with them. Three days later, Joshua and his leaders found out that they had been deceived. The men were from the nearby city of Gibeon. Because Israel was a people of their word, they could now not destroy the people of Gibeon. They would even have to help them if they were attacked by others.

God had instructed them to devote to destruction all the pagan peoples of Canaan, but now there would still be a root of temptation left in the land, a pagan people who could lead them astray.

The discouraging part of the story is that in Joshua 9:14, while they were deciding whether to make the peace treaty with the foreigners or not, we read, ***“But (they) did not ask the counsel of the LORD.”*** It was a huge decision. They trusted what they heard, what they saw, and what they thought, but they did not “Inquire of God”. It was this over-confidence that allowed the deception. God had given them instructions and provided all the resources that they would need to accomplish His will for them, but because they had relied on themselves, they would miss out on God’s perfect will.

Throughout scripture we see that God's people inquired of Him. They inquired when choosing a king, when concerned about the health of a birth, when considering battle, when seeking blessing, when seeking revival, when seeking safety, when needing wisdom, when striving to govern well, when choosing new leaders, when studying God's Word, and in the face of emergencies. Inquiring of the LORD, asking for the counsel of the LORD, was a pattern for God's people throughout scripture.

In Jeremiah 33:3 we read, ***"Call to me and I will answer you, and tell you great and unsearchable things that you do not know."***

In Jeremiah 29:12-13 it says, ***"Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."***

Isaiah 55:6 declares, ***"Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on Him while He is near."***

One of the clearest examples of inquiring of the LORD was King David. King David was a man of faith who, as a young man, had defeated the giant Goliath in battle. He was a man with abilities in music, poetry, battle and even governing a mighty nation. He was rich, powerful and respected by many. Even with all of these worldly accolades, King David still humbled himself and inquired of the LORD, throughout his lifetime.

He inquired of the Lord before battle, when fleeing from King Saul, when seeking the reason for a famine, when seeing if he should build the temple. It was such a pattern of David's life that in Acts 13:22 we read, ***"He (God) raised up David to be their king, of whom He testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'"***

David had a heart that was listening for God's voice and a will that was already committed to obey, even before He heard God's instructions. This is the foundational truth from God's Word. God will speak to those who have a heart to hear and a will to obey. At the same time, in scripture we see examples when people inquired of God and He refused to respond, because they did not have ears to hear or the heart to obey.

We can see this in the life of King Saul, David's predecessor. When we read in 1 Samuel 28, King Saul had already been put aside by God for his disobedience. In v. 6, King Saul inquired of the Lord and the Lord did not answer, ***"either by dreams, or by urim, or by prophets."*** In response Saul sought out a medium, a woman who could talk to the dead. She called up the prophet Samuel, who testified against King Saul: ***"Why do you ask me (the prophet of God) since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? . . . because you did not obey the voice of the LORD."***

Saul was "Inquiring of the LORD" for guidance, but did not have ears to hear or the will to obey. Because of his ongoing disobedience, God refused to respond to Saul when he inquired of God.

In Ezekiel 14, we find another example. The elders of Israel came to the prophet of God, inquiring of the LORD, but God could see that their hearts were filled with idols and iniquity. The LORD did not have ears for their inquiries when their hearts were far from Him. In response, God commanded that they repent, turn away from their idols, and turn their faces from all their abominations. If men chose to separate themselves from God by cherishing sinful idols in their hearts, God would set His

face against them and cut them off from the midst of His people so that it would be known that He is the LORD.

If we want to be a people who inquire of the Lord, we do not start by discussing methods. Inquiring of the LORD starts with the humility to realize how much we need God's guidance and direction. The prerequisite for all who will inquire of the LORD is that we have a heart to hear. Secondly, we must be already committed to obey whatever God may say, before we ever inquire of Him.

Jesus, Himself, is our greatest example. In Matthew 26:36-46, we read the account of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the evening before He was arrested and eventually crucified. We read that he was filled with sorrow, to the point of death. Nonetheless, Jesus sought the Lord and prayed these words, ***"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*** Facing the worst of suffering that was to come, He inquired of the LORD with a heart that was ready to hear and a will that was already committed to obey. Even though Christ had a preference, ***"let this cup pass from me"***, His greater desire was that God's will would be done. His heart had been brought to a neutral place where He was prepared to do whatever God willed. With that in mind, He turned His face towards the cross and obeyed completely.

Truly inquiring of the LORD hinges on the word "LORD". Is He Lord? If not, any act of "Inquiring of the LORD" will more resemble the experience of King Saul or the elders of Israel in Ezekiel 14. The LORD will have nothing to say in response to a mouth that is asking without a heart that is listening.

In the Old Testament people would inquire of God through prophets. God often chose a prophet or spokesmen to speak to the people on His behalf. They would come to the prophet seeking God, and God would then speak to the prophet about their situation. At other times, people would go to the priests. In a pouch on the front of their priestly garment called the Ephod, they kept sacred stones called the Urim & Thummim. They would be cast like dice and the result would communicate God's will for the situation. It might be a yes, no, or no answer at all. At other times, God would communicate through dreams, visions or even angels. While some of that is still possible today, the general way that God speaks to His people, post-Pentecost, is different.

When I say "post-Pentecost" I am referring to the point when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in God's people. At that time, Jesus Christ had already come, died and been raised from the dead so that we could be reconciled to God. Now, all who have turned from their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ are in Christ, and He in us. The Holy Spirit now lives in us convicting us of sin, transforming our desires and guiding us into all truth. We also now have God's Word to guide us. Through His Word we learn about God, about ourselves, about the world around us, about wisdom and the values and priorities that we are called to as Christians.

All of that comes into play as we "inquire of the Lord".

We also add godly counsel from others as another way God may choose to speak to us, and also the circumstances of a given situation.

Let's consider a scenario from your life about which you need to inquire of the Lord.

A good place to start is by laying it before God in prayer. Even better, have others join in prayer for this matter as well. Prayer is an inward and outward expression of submitting your will to God's will from the very beginning of process. This allows you to have your spiritual ears open, sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Philippians 4:6-7 also promises that as we submit to God in prayer, He will protect us from anxiety and grant us a peace that passes understanding. That is very helpful when trying to follow God to an unbiased, unworried, wise decision.

Next, are you ready to obey whatever God leads you to do? Remember that Inquiring of the Lord is useless if He is not Lord.

Next, learn all you can to have a complete understanding of the situation, the options and possible outcomes.

With this in place, search the Bible for any truths, priorities, examples, commands or teachings that apply to your situation.

Seek wise counsel from those who know you, who know God, and those who are familiar with the details of the options that you are considering.

At times God will respond to your inquiry by making things clear through the circumstances. Maybe a visa is refused or a job offer is removed. Maybe a political situation changes, or you find out about details that lead you to say "no" or "yes" to a job, a relationship, a decision or whatever situation you are faced with.

In addition to all of these, God still has the freedom to speak through a dream, an audible voice, or any various ways of divine impressions. But even these must be submitted to scripture, prayer, and possibly filtered through the wise, godly, counsel of others.

To summarize "Inquiring of the Lord" let's remember these phrases: Submit it to God in prayer. Commit to obey God's will even before He shows you what it is. Turn to God's Word for direction. Speak with God's people for wise counsel. Even in the midst of all of this, remember that when we Inquire of the Lord, the decisive factor is not the method, but the intimate relationship that we have with God. That as we walk with Him, we will hear Him speak, if He truly is our Lord.

In closing, may our minds go back to Joshua 9. The problem was not that Joshua and the leaders of Israel were against God or His will. It was just that, in the midst of the situation, they did not even think of inquiring of the Lord. They just naturally relied on themselves and missed out on the wisdom and blessing of God.

May that not be true of us. May God humble our hearts, attune our ears, and submit our will to His. In that we will find a God who is attentive when we inquire of the Lord.

Discussion questions:

1. What part of the sermon was meaningful to you?
2. Can you remember a time in your life that you had to make a very important or difficult decision? What strategy did you use to make your decision?

3. As a group, retell the story found in Joshua 9.
4. From the story of King Saul and the elders in Ezekiel 14, what will keep us from hearing God's will when we inquire of Him?
5. How would you explain the following sentence in your own words? "God will speak to those who have a heart to hear and a will to obey."
6. Once our heart and will are prepared, what other methods do we use to find God's will?
7. What do you need to remember from this sermon?
8. How do you think God would have you apply it to your life?
9. How can we pray for you about this?