

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

February 17, 2013

Battling Temptation

Joshua 7:16-26

Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken. The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken. Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."

Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.

Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

Many of you know that I did my vicar year, the year when I served as a pastoral intern, in Ottawa, Ontario. There is a canal in Ottawa called the Rideau Canal and every year the city officials in Ottawa drain the canal down and turn it into the world's largest ice skating rink. It is 4.8 miles long and hundreds of thousands of people go skating on it every year. It was about a 10 minute walk from my house and I went skating on it several times when I was in Ottawa.

One night as I was skating I was faced with a dilemma. There were several entrances to the canal but the entrance to the canal that was closest to my house was closed with a fence across the canal and no one was supposed to skate on that section of the ice because it was deemed too dangerous to skate on, but there was a way around the fence and by my estimation about half to three quarters of the people who came to the fence went around it.

It presented me with a unique temptation. I could ignore the signs and the fence which were put up to protect my safety or I could obey them and keep myself safe. I thought to myself, "Do I give into this temptation and skate on the ice? It looks safe enough and I won't get caught at all or do I double back and walk to the extra five minutes to get back across the canal and to my house?" This is a mini-example of the hundreds of temptations we battle every day and is the theme for our sermon today:

Battling Temptation

I. A failure

II. A success

Our Old Testament lesson today takes place right after the Israelites had just taken the great city of Jericho. This battle made Joshua a bit overconfident and Joshua let his pride get the best of him as he turned his attention to his next target: the nearby town of Ai. He figured because Ai was small he wouldn't need to send all of the fighting men. "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there."

Ai's small size also made Joshua overconfident that he didn't need to ask the Lord for guidance in the battle. Big mistake. If Joshua would've gone to the Lord he would've known, "The Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel." Joshua sent his forces into battle, "but they were routed by the men of Ai."

Why had the Lord allowed Israel to be routed? Someone in Israel had ignored God's command when he had said, "The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it."

The Lord charged Joshua to find the guilty party and Joshua's response to the Lord's command was immediate. "Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes." Joshua had the people come forward and the Lord would direct the process. This process must've been agonizing for Achan who was guilty of taking the devoted things. Imagine what it felt like for him as these events happened. "Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken."

Achan's heart must've started beating a little bit faster because it was his tribe, but no matter the Lord will pick someone else. "The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites." One step closer for Achan because he took Achan's clan. "He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and

Zimri was taken.” By now Achan’s heart must’ve been racing at a mile a minute because Achan’s family was chosen. “Joshua had his family come forward man by man.”

Achan should’ve seen the hand writing on the wall, come forward and confessed his sins but he hoped God would make a mistake by finding someone else guilty instead of him. But God doesn’t make mistakes. His justice always finds the guilty party. The final group comes forward and Achan is taken. His sin of giving in to temptation is laid bare for all to see. He couldn’t hide it and now everyone in the camp knows it is his fault that disaster was brought on Israel because he ignored God’s command.

What about us? How well do we do when it comes to God’s clear commands? What does the young girl do when she faces temptation to break the sixth commandment when her boyfriend tells her he loves her more than anything in this world but he doesn’t know if she really loves him and the only way he’ll know that she loves him is if she sleeps with him? “I love you.” The words she has been waiting to hear for what seems like forever and when she hears them her head is lost and spinning among the clouds.

But they also bring fear and dread. She is afraid she’ll lose his love if she doesn’t give in to his demands. Will she ever hear them again if she doesn’t give in? She finally gives in to his demands and doesn’t stop to think for a minute that maybe the guy is toying with her emotions to get what he wants because he doesn’t mean them at all. After she gives in she finds out the guy didn’t love her because he walks away from her a few days later.

What happens to the man who finds himself in Achan’s shoes? God says give me your best and I will reward you. But when he looks at his paycheck, instead of taking a cloak from Shinar, 200 shekels of silver and a tongue of gold, he pays first for his luxury car, plasma TV, his hunting equipment and alcohol which helps him forget about his crummy life and then says, “Here you go God. You can have what is left over.”

Like the people who skated around the fence on the canal we ignore God’s commands to give him our best and our all. We ignore his commands about remaining sexually pure because we believe they hurt our lifestyle and take all the fun out of life. The people who went around the fence forgot that the whole point of the fence on the canal was to keep them safe and avoid injury. Not to be an inconvenience. God’s commands are meant to keep us safe and away from temptation’s harm. Not to be a killjoy.

Battling with temptation is often times hard. Often times we are just like Achan because we lose our battle with temptation when it comes knocking at our door. But what happens when temptation comes and it carries us away? Should we fall into despair and think there is no way God can possibly forgive us because we have wronged him? No. We should not despair when we give into temptation because the story of Achan does contain a success.

“Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.’” The moment of truth finally arrives for Achan. Would he confess or deny his sin? “Achan replied, ‘It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them.’

“‘They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.’ Joshua sent messengers to Achan’s tent and found everything as Achan had said.” Would some of you be surprised to hear me say that Achan ends up being a good example for us? You might think there is no way he could but I ask you

to hear me out. Compare Achan with Adam and Eve. When Achan is confronted with his sin he makes no effort to hide what he has done. He accepts full responsibility for his actions.

He doesn't lie to Joshua and Joshua's men find everything just as Achan had said. Adam and Eve tried to hide their sin even though God confronted them with it. Achan serves as a good example for us because we don't always like to come clean when we sin. We like to rationalize and excuse our sins. When we are guilty a full confession acknowledges our sins to God and our fellow Christians. Confession acknowledges God's miracle of salvation.

The Holy Spirit helps me to acknowledge the fact I give into temptation but there is someone who didn't give in to temptation. Our brother Jesus was tempted like us in every way but overcame temptation on our behalf. He tells us because he has overcome temptation our sins are forgiven. Just because our sin of giving into temptation is forgiven our sin sometimes brings trouble. Even though Achan confessed his sins God still punished him for what he had done.

"Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today." Feelings and trust are two things hurt and broken when a person gives into temptation. They are not easy to repair and restore and are a real consequence of sin, but they are sins Jesus died for. Jesus' cross and his love for us help us resist the temptation of harboring anger over hurt feelings because of what someone did to us.

It can be hard for a female to resist her boyfriend's pressures to have sex. He can play with her emotions and try and convince her she will never be able to find another guy if he breaks up with her because she won't do what he wants. First and foremost, if she does give in to temptation, but repents of what she has done Jesus assures her she is forgiven. He promises with his help she can fight against temptation and learn from her mistakes.

It might be tempting for a family to put their own wants and needs first before giving to the Lord but when they realize what God has done for them it isn't as hard. Instead of being a burden it is a joy to give to the Lord from their best. Look at how God dealt with Israel. All he wanted was Jericho. The rest of the land would be theirs. It was MUCH MORE than one city. It was an entire country. God took care of Israel and he will take care of us too.

For those of you who were wondering I ended up back tracking on the canal and listened to the signs protecting my safety. We will fail many times when it comes to temptation but when we fail we can turn it into a success. We can confess and repent of our sins and trust God has forgiven us. Amen.