

## Fighting Temptation: I Want What God Wants!

A sermon based on Joshua 7:16-26 – ***“Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. <sup>17</sup> The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. <sup>18</sup> Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.***

***<sup>19</sup> Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”***

***<sup>20</sup> Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: <sup>21</sup> When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”***

***<sup>22</sup> So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. <sup>23</sup> They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord.***

***<sup>24</sup> Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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.”***

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We didn't have to travel 700 miles to figure it out, but there was a part of the marriage enrichment and get-away weekend Becky and I went to last week that served as a great reminder – a humbling reminder – for us in our marriage. We were asked to do this: Determine the hardest and most important function of being a husband or wife. Any guesses?

The hardest and yet most single important function of being a husband or wife is to live not for ourselves and our own happiness but for our spouse and his/her own happiness. In other words, it's to be looking out for and serving the best interests of your spouse. How many of you struggle with that in your marriage (you don't need to raise your hands, I'm sure you all do, from time to time)?

And that's not just a marriage thing...self-centeredness, that's an inherent human weakness. We talk about some potential change here....CHANGE?!?! And the first thought that enters the minds of many is “How's this going to affect me?” The workout program Becky and I are going through, the instructor will talk about “doing what's best for you, becoming the best you,” highly encouraging “self-care,” going

even so far this past week as to say along the lines of, “the only way you can know your future is to create it for yourself.” Rachel Hollis, a top motivational speaker for today, has written top sellers “Girl, Wash Your Face” and “Girl, Stop Apologizing,” self-help books aimed at helping you see that you need to live this life to its fullest and give up everything to follow your dreams. I’m sure most of you are familiar with the newest fad, KonMari, meant to help you declutter your life by asking the, in all seriousness, self-serving question, “Does this bring me joy?”

Achan would have originally answered that question with a resounding “yes,” but joy’s not what he experienced in the end.

Maybe I should rewind a little. Now, the Israelites were fresh off a spectacular victory at Jericho, after God had brought those walls tumbling down. But any high they were riding came just as quickly tumbling down. You see, God had commanded his people that, after they destroyed Jericho, any spoils they found belonged to him. Guess who didn’t listen? Guess who saw the riches, thought only about himself and what he wanted, and sneakily took some of the spoils and hid them back home? Achan.

The Lord’s anger, understandably, burned against Israel...so much so that when they went to fight the next “city,” Ai, which should have been like a team beating the Super Bowl champions getting to go and play some rinky-dink high school football team the next week and slaughter them...when the Israelites went to that battle, they got it handed to them. Joshua asked God what happened, God revealed how his command had been disobeyed, leading to our verses from our 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson for this morning, where Achan was brought forward as the culprit and was stoned to death because of his greediness, his cover-up, his unfaithfulness.

Do you think about how easily Achan could have righted his wrong? I mean, the whole process of dwindling down to the guilty party? They had to figure out which tribe, then the clan, then the family, then who in the family had angered God....sifting through hundreds of thousands of Israelites. That was not a quick process...yet during the long ordeal, Achan never came forward. What was going on in his mind? Did he think he could escape God’s detection? Can anyone? He certainly couldn’t, and he paid the price...with his life.

Is there a more blatant example of greed, selfishness, self-centeredness than Achan? Of someone falling prey to temptation, to coveting – wanting what you want, even if God said no, and then taking it for yourself?

Yes, yes there are...Jonah, who’d rather run the opposite way from where God called him to preach...Judas, who was willing to hand God over to death for 30 pieces of silver...David, who had an innocent husband and a good man killed so he could take his wife and cover up his sexual immorality....Adam and Eve, who had all the fruit they could eat yet took from the one tree God said don’t.

And then, of course, there’s you and me. Right, before you hurl a stone with the rest of the Israelites, maybe you need to do a thorough (or maybe not so thorough) examination of your life. To see, let’s play a round of “God says...and your response.”

God says, ***“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” (Hebrews 10:24-25)***, referring to our worship lives, and our response to worship...our service to God and others.

And your response? "I had a long week at work or a late night Saturday. Sunday's my only day to sleep in. Family's here for a few days. I want to make the most out of it with them." Or, maybe even, "I think God's ok with me simply being at worship, but the other stuff, offerings, Bible Class, church service, that's not for me. I don't need to do that." Is that what God wants or what you want?

God says, ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).***

And your response? "I want Pastor to go out and do that. I'm more comfortable keeping my faith personal and to myself because I'm uncomfortable with how others might react." Is that what God wants or what you want?

God says, ***"A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret" (Proverbs 11:13).***

And your response? "I want to tell someone else about what so and so did under the façade of me caring about them, but I actually enjoy reveling in their misery." Is that what God wants or what you want?

God says, ***"If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).***

And your response? "I'll thumb my friend's picture on Facebook which was expletive-ridden, extremely disrespectful/condescending, supporting some form of immorality because it was funny, it makes me feel good, or I want to be loving to and supportive of them." Is that what God wants or what you want?

And, we could keep going, but you get the picture, don't you? Each of us battles with temptation every day. God tells us "no." We say "yes." He tells us to stay away from something. We go directly toward that something. We want only what we want. And it's often not an accident. For Achan's sin, he admitted it wasn't just a matter of momentary weakness. It was calculated: "I saw...I coveted...I took."

How many of us would be in the same boat? We know what God says. But, unfortunately and sinfully, we thumb our noses up at him and do what we want. Maybe we try to rationalize our sins, like Achan may have when temptation leaped out at him, "No one will know. What a waste if I don't take some of this! I'm not being greedy; I just want to take care of my family. What I'm taking is a pittance compared to all the wealth here. There must be thousands of other Israelites doing the same thing."

But no matter how well we might reason the sin out in our minds, it's still sin. It's still what we want, not what God wants...what God demands. And that's all of us. And our fate should mirror that of Achan's, where he was stoned because he had been found guilty of violating the covenant of the holy Lord, and then, his body was burned to purge the land of evil. Our fate should mirror that, except on the scale of eternity, with our bodies burning every day in the eternal kingdom of evil, hell.

You know, for Achan, we might have expected Joshua to grab him by the throat and rant about the humiliation he had caused his army. But Joshua's concern was not revenge for personal injury. Look at the tender tone he took with Achan as he said, ***"My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him" (Joshua 7:19),*** which was his way of saying, "tell me the truth, the whole truth, and confess your sins to God." Joshua yearned for true and heartfelt repentance to God.

In the same way, for our foolish, selfish, and self-centered sins, we might expect God to say, “You knuckleheads, I’ve had it with you. You’ve had chance after chance to do the right thing...and to fess up when you’ve messed up...and you haven’t! You’ve blew it too many times.”

But he doesn’t. He doesn’t. Instead he lovingly tells us, **“Whoever confesses and renounces [their sins] finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13)**. And when we do? God shows mercy; he forgives us.

You know why? Well, what does God want? Us to be in heaven with him. And what that took was someone who would purge evil, not out of this land, but out of you and me. And that someone was Jesus.

You know, Jesus, like us, was no stranger to temptation. He fought the same battles against sin and Satan that we do. I mean, think back to the gospel. Satan tried to prey on Jesus’ basic human wants. “Jesus, you must be starving. Change those stones to bread.” And Jesus’ response, “God knows I need to feed on his Word more than physical nourishment.” Satan said, “Just bow your knee to me for a few seconds, and you’ll be rich beyond your wildest imagination.” And Jesus’ response, “God wants the worship and praise for himself alone. No amount of money could ever be worth more than that.”

You know why Jesus didn’t give in? Yes, he’s God...that would be the safe answer. But, just as importantly, he did it for you. Jesus battled against temptation, yet was without sin for you.

Jesus was perfect, so much so, that even when he was on the road to the cross, and Satan’s temptation would have been, “Give up the fight...save yourself...the road is too tough, too painful, and for people who are just going to do what they want anyways.” Yet Jesus didn’t stray. His prayer in Gethsemane, **“Not my will, but yours be done” (Matthew 20:23)**, “Not what I want God, but what you want; I will do that.”

Jesus went to the cross to battle for us, for our forgiveness, for our eternal righteousness. And he rose to unlock the door to heaven for you, for me, for our eternity.

If the hardest and yet most single important function of being not just a husband or wife, but even just a child of Christ is to live not for ourselves and our own happiness but for the happiness of God and to give God glory – which it is – then Jesus was the only one who was able to do it perfectly through his life, death, and resurrection.

And now he WANTS us to do the same. And, saved by Jesus, we WANT to do that. We want to obey God. But that’s not easy. You know that. So, here’s the comfort...when we go our own way and sin, Jesus calls us to repentance. And when we confess our sins, he forgives us.

And, going one step further, here’s what he tell us, **“It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13)**. Christ is with us and in us fighting temptation to be selfish and self-centered so that we want what he wants and do what he wants.

And here’s a good way to start doing that. An exercise we were asked to do at our marriage enrichment was to fill out the following statement: “One way I may have been thinking of myself more than you lately is \_\_\_\_\_. And I’d like to change that.”

Let’s take 30 seconds right now. That statement is in your worship folder. Fill it out in regards to your relationship with Jesus.

And now this week, take some time to confess that sin and take it to the foot of the cross. Spend some time in God's Word. Confess that sin of self-centeredness. Be enriched by the gospel – the power of God to bring about that change. Pray to God on it. And maybe it'll start the cycle for getting more in tune with what God wants and doing what God wants, not what you want.

Friends, that's an ongoing struggle, not only in a marriage, but also in our relationship with Jesus. God be with you, God work through you and work through his Word in you to mirror Jesus in everything...in everything he wants. That'll bring true and lasting joy. Amen.

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