

Fighting Temptation – Wanting only what YOU want

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Imagine for a moment that we're all Israelites. We've recently crossed the Jordan river after 40 years in the wilderness. Can you believe it? We've finally made it to the promised land. After all this time, we get to see the promise of the LORD come true! It's been a long, tough journey. Forty years wandering in a desert wasn't easy. But the LORD was always with us. He provided manna in the morning and quail in the evening to feed us. He reminded us of his promise, through the stories told by our fathers. None of us had ever seen Egypt before, but it sounded like hell on earth. But God's promise of land and a Savior still remained. The LORD would give his people the land he had promised them.

Just last week, we witnessed the beginning of that promise coming true. The LORD, through Joshua, commanded us to conquer the land, to go to war against the enemies of God and wipe them all out. Well, that all started with Jericho. But the battle was strange. It wasn't like any other battle we had experienced. All we had to do was walk around the city, and after a week of that, God destroyed the city. But even more strange was what we were supposed to do after the city was defeated. Before we ever set foot in the city, Joshua told us the LORD's command. Everything in the city, all the people, every animal, and all the possessions and property were all "haram." Entirely dedicated to God. Banned, Not to be taken as plunder, but instead given to God as an offering. Quite the opposite of what we normally would do, but it was the command of God, and so we followed it.

Then, just a few days ago, we attacked Ai. What a mess. Our scouts told us that the city was very small. It would be easy to defeat them with only a few thousand men. To our surprise, we were handily defeated, and over thirty of our men died. What had happened? The LORD had promised he would be with us! Something has to be wrong for God to allow this to happen. And sure enough, the LORD spoke to Joshua, and told him that someone had taken some of his devoted things for themselves. Someone had broken his commands, and the LORD would show us who.

It was Achan. He had taken several things when no one was looking. He hadn't done what the LORD wanted. He had followed after his sinful desires! We heard his confession with our own ears, when he said, **"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 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."** What was Achan thinking? That he could get away with it? That these things had been banned from everyone else, but he could do as he pleased? He may have hidden his sin under his tent, but sin is never hidden from God's sight.

So we had to do an awful thing. Achan had disobeyed this command from God, and there were consequences because of that. We took him to the Valley of Trouble, and there we stoned him and his family. All of his possessions and animals, and even the "haram," the devoted things from Jericho, were burned along with them. Now we could see with our own eyes how seriously God takes those who do what they want, instead of what he wants. It's deathly serious.

I. We do what WE want

Fast forward several thousand years to today, March 10, 2019. Even though so much time has passed, the story of Achan still relates to each of us. By nature, we want to do what WE want, not to follow someone else's desires. Our sinful nature tempts us to treat God's commands as optional, just like the trap that Achan fell into. But what is banned or devoted for us? We certainly won't be putting a city under siege any time soon (or at least I hope that's the case). God tells us that our lives are to be devoted to him. Worshiping him, praying to him, training our children up in the Lord, loving and serving our neighbors. God wants us to do these all the time! As he says in Lev. 19:1 **"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."** But instead of doing this, we see the sinful "plunder" of the world, and want it. To take things that don't belong to us. To live a life of lust

or excess, always chasing after the next dollar. Cheating or slighting those who have less than us. The list could go on and on, but all of these temptations are what WE want, not what God wants.

When we do only what we want, we're rejecting God and his commands for us. He tells us, "You shall have no other gods" in the first commandment, but anytime we sin, we are making that thing an idol, and worshipping it instead of God. That outright rejection of God is exactly what our sinful nature wants. After all, as St. Paul says in Romans 8:7 **"the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."**

As if this wasn't bad enough, sometimes we think, just like Achan, that we can hide our sins. "Well it's not a big deal that I've done what I want. No one else knows. Even God doesn't seem to care. I don't think he even knows." But our lesson this morning shows us that God always knows. He may not punish us immediately, like he did with Achan, but that doesn't mean that we've gotten a "free pass." He knows our sin and wants us to turn from our selfish desires. But what if we don't heed this call to repent, to turn from our sins? Well the result is even more terrifying than what happened to Achan!

God promises eternal punishment if we refuse to turn from our sin. The end result of sin is even worse than it was for Achan. He suffered for a little while at the end of his life, beaten to death by stoning. But if there is no repentance, there is no end to the suffering that awaits us in hell.

This certainly is a bleak thought, and on its own would leave us only with despair. However, our gospel lesson this morning shows us where our salvation lies - in Jesus alone. He is the only one who fought off every temptation, including the temptation to serve himself. Jesus did what his heavenly Father wanted, every day, all the time. It's only through faith in his perfect obedience and death that we are able to fight off temptation!

II. Jesus did what God wants!

In our gospel lesson, Jesus begins his own conquest against Satan in the wilderness. In verses one and two, we hear, **"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry."** This time spent in the wilderness was no easy task. I certainly couldn't imagine going a few days without food, much less 40 days straight! In this weakened and hungry state, the devil thought he saw an opportunity. He would offer Jesus these temptations to destroy the plan of salvation. Stones to bread, authority over all things, even testing the promises of God himself! He tempted Jesus to do what he wanted instead of what God wants, but notice how Jesus responds. He turns to the Word, and fights off the devil. As we just sang in the hymn of the day, "One little word can fell him!" The devil's power and temptations are nothing when he's faced with the Word of God! Jesus fought temptation, just as we do every day. The only difference was that he won every single time!

Jesus' victories over temptations and the devil continued not just for those 40 days, but for all his 33 years, including the ultimate victory on the cross for us. The result of his constant victory is amazing. Forgiveness from all of our sins. Eternal life for all who believe in him! Peace, comfort, hope and every blessing, all through faith! Because of what Jesus did for us, God now does something else that's amazing. As our sermon text concludes in verse 26, **the LORD has turned from his fierce anger.** God no longer sees our sinful rebellion, but instead the perfect obedience of his Son, our Savior.

The LORD – the God of free and faithful grace... the I AM, who is always faithful to us, that God **URNS** from his wrath towards us, even though we deserve it. What an act of grace, undeserved and yet he chooses to do so because he loves us and desires our salvation. God desires this for you and for me. He alone gives me the strength to fight temptation when Satan hurls it our way. He gives us this strength through his word... just like where Jesus found his strength...

We are not without direction for this fight. We're not left guessing at what God wants. As the psalmist writes in Psalm 119:105, **Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path.** God shows us his will, what HE wants, in his word. He wants all to be saved by faith in Jesus. He wants sin and temptation fought against and destroyed. He wants us to devote our lives to him. To worship him and pray to him and love and adore all things that are a part of his Will. All of that is possible only because of the love that he first showed to us by sending his Son to die on the cross.

We are never alone in our fight against temptation. God is always with us, always giving us the strength to do so through his Word, to say no to the devil, and instead pray, "God, not my will, but your will be done." Life is not without its struggles. and almost constant temptations, but even in the midst of these trials, you can rejoice. Rejoice that God shows you your sins, because he uses that to bring you closer to him. Rejoice that your Savior loves you, and followed his Father's will perfectly. Rejoice, as you strive to do the Father's will, enjoying the love and grace of your Heavenly Father. Amen.