

Sunday Sermon - Pastor Josh Olson  
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## “Stand Before God in Confidence Next to Your High Priest”

Hebrews 4:14-16

Does it seem harsh? The people of Israel had just conquered Jericho. You remember the story. They marched around the walls and they came crumbling down. It was an incident that would be repeated over and over again as Israel conquered the land of Canaan. God would give them the rest of the land just as He gave them Jericho. And so Jericho was to be left alone. Its walls never rebuilt, its houses never inhabited, the plunder never touched. It was to be left as is that it might be a reminder to Israel’s future generations of how they received this land. That all who passed by would remember that they didn’t build these cities or plant these fields, but that God gave them to them. But Achan disobeyed the command. He saw some of the plunder and was filled with envy and jealousy for it. That desire consumed him and he decided to disobey the Lord’s order to leave all the plunder for him and took some for himself. Some silver, some gold, and a robe. He probably assumed no one would ever know. But God knew. So Israel stoned him and his whole household.

Does it seem harsh? Who hasn’t done what Achan did? Even if you’ve never committed the act of stealing something, we have all had covetous desires in our hearts. All had times where we wanted what God hasn’t given us in a sinful, covetous way. Perhaps even taking hold of us to a point that it consumes our thoughts and shows in our actions as we finally just take it. In fact, it seems at times that coveting drives our economy! So rampant in our country you might call it an American characteristic! If God were to dole out this punishment consistently, who would be sitting here today? Who among us wouldn’t belong at the bottom of that pile of stones along with Achan?

But God doesn’t make mistakes when it comes to justice. The wages of sin is death. He wasn’t kidding about that. In his grace, God often holds back his judgment over our sin. He is patient and wants all to be saved. But don’t let God’s patient forbearance, the fact that he doesn’t immediately strike us down for sin, blind you to the fact that the wages of sin is death. In this case, it was vital for Israel to remember who was giving them this land and whose land it really was. Achan’s sin undermined that lesson and threatened to lead Israel away from the Lord. In our cases, the Lord has been gracious to us and has not punished us as our sins deserved. If we have faced consequences for those sins, it was to discipline us. But those consequences never reach the depths of what our sin truly deserves. Don’t abuse God’s patience by thinking otherwise. God doesn’t make mistakes when it comes to justice. The wages of sin is death.

So then how can we stand before God with any confidence? Knowing that we are no better than Achan! That the same covetous desires that drove him to steal from the Lord at Jericho are too often stewing in our hearts and driving our thoughts. Knowing that God sees all! That the reason that we are still sitting here today isn’t because we’ve managed to hide this from God. Rather, he has had a front row seat to every sin we have ever committed. He knows them and the depths of their perversity even better than we do! How can we stand before God and do anything but shiver in fear when we realize that I am no better than Achan! And that God knows it!

The answer is found in our High Priest. The writer to the Hebrews writes, “14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” The difference between us and Achan isn’t that our sin is somehow less deadly – all sin deserves death. It isn’t that we have managed to hide our sin from God anymore than Achan could hide his sin beneath his tent. It is that we have a high priest.

We can stand before God in confidence because Jesus, our high priest, defeated temptation for us. We look at Jesus' temptation by the devil in the wilderness often in worship. But don't let the frequency with which we visit this scene rob you of the grace found in it. What is Jesus doing there! He is true God, the creator the universe, all-knowing and all powerful, eternal, holy, and far above facing off with Satan. Why would he even be there, much less exchange words with him?

For you. Because we are in this same situation day after day and have met nothing but failure after failure. So much so, that for us to be tempted is to sin. Because we can't imagine being tempted and not at least indulging in that temptation in our minds. We struggle to see how Jesus could be truly tempted without sinning because to us if you don't at least give into in your mind, you aren't tempted! We have had no other experience with temptation but failure. That is why Jesus is standing there in our gospel lesson, doing battle with one of his fallen angels. So that he might conquer temptation for you. And so the devil tempts him with earthly blessings, with visions of glory and honor, even with testing God. Temptations that have worked countless times on the human race. But temptations that Jesus defeated perfectly. For you. So that his perfect record in dealing with temptation might be credited to your account.

Then that life lived for you was given for you. Before us we see the linen cloth from Ash Wednesday, smeared with the ashes that we put there that night. It was a reminder of how Jesus went to the cross bearing our sin and our guilt. You see, the death that our sin deserved had to be paid for. But the Lord didn't do that by carrying it out on you. He did that by carrying it out on his Son. Throughout human history God waited to deal with sin as it deserved. And then, with His son on the cross bearing the sins of the world, the Lord focused his anger and wrath over sin there.

It is true. If you were to stand before God with your record of dealing with temptation, you would deserve far worse than what Achan received. But we don't. Through faith in Christ his victory over temptation is credited to your account. Through faith in Christ, the price for your sin has been paid. In Jesus, you have defeated the devil and his work. In Jesus, you can stand before God in confidence.

In Jesus, you can come to God in confidence. In times of temptation, the writer to the Hebrews says that you can go to Jesus and find not wrath, but sympathy! It should be the last place you can go! He is a holy God who has defeated the devil for us and yet time after time we continue to fall into sin. He sees as we fail miserably in the face of temptation, sometimes the exact same temptation, time after time. Consider all that tempts us! We are tempted in thought, word, and deed constantly. And what's worse, is that we keep falling into the same ones! It should be nauseating to him. It is nauseating to everyone else. For as much as the world likes to feign understanding, they seldom show it. Our friends, our family, our loved ones, they will only put up with so much. And after watching us struggle with a temptation, it won't take long before we exhaust their forgiveness and understanding, before we exhaust their sympathy. But in our Holy God who hates sin with more fury than he showed even in how he dealt with Achan, we find understanding! Sympathy!

Compassion!

Why? Because of Jesus, our high priest. He has faced temptation. He knows what you are dealing with on a daily basis by experience. And he doesn't dismiss it, he defeats it. He has defeated it for you and wiped away all your sins. He empowers you to battle it every day. And as you struggle you can go to him and know that you will receive gracious understanding, not one that tolerates sin. But one that defeated sin for you and empowers you to leave it behind. It is why Jesus came to this world – to defeat temptation for you and to deal with you graciously as you battle it daily.

In Jesus, your confidence before God is such that you can not only find sympathy with your God, but you can also go to him boldly in prayer and expect him to help you with your life. Isn't that a special kind of confidence? Who else can you go to in life and expect such a thing? Will your parents listen to your requests in every aspect of life? Your friends? Your family? At some point, even the closest earthly relationship falls short of this. But because of Jesus you can go to God in prayer boldly for big things and little, and expect nothing but his grace and mercy. Expect nothing but his help for your need exactly as you need it to be! With never a hint of annoyance or a lack of understanding in his answer. He shouldn't care! He should discard us

altogether! Yet despite that he does far more than tolerate our prayers. He is so interested in us! He shows a level of interest in us that no one else shows and answers our prayers accordingly.

Does it seem harsh? As you look at the story of Achan, it can chill you to the bone. Because we know that first of all, God doesn't make mistakes when it comes to justice. And we know that second of all, we are certainly no better than Achan. If you or I or anyone were to dare to stand before God alone, with only our own life and merits before us, we'd be fools to be anything other than terrified. But that is never the case. From the moment the Lord brought you into his family, your high priest has always been there. Covering you in his perfect life so that you meet God's demands. Taking away your sins in the blood he shed for you. With your high priest next to you, you can have absolute confidence not only to stand before God, but to come to him in temptation and with your prayers and respect nothing but sympathy, grace, and mercy. Amen.