

DON'T BELIEVE THE DEVIL'S COMPELLING LIES!

He's no cute, cuddly comic book character. He doesn't wear a shiny red suit or wield a pitchfork in his hand, though he'd love it if you pictured him that way. The last thing the devil wants is for you to see him as real or in any way dangerous; he'd much rather you consider him fictional or friendly.

The devil's propaganda, however, can't take away the reality. God tells us the truth about the devil in Scripture. In 1 Peter 5, we hear these words: *"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour."* He's not a friend, but an enemy. His interest is not in helping, but devouring. In John 8, Jesus said, *"He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."* He's a murderer – he wants to snatch life away from people, taking them away from God. Everything he says is a lie.

We heard the lies he told Jesus in the holy Gospel. There was some truth in each of the things that he said, but, in the final analysis, each statement was a lie. Today, as we study this section from Joshua 7, we want to remind ourselves again of the way our enemy operates. He lies. He may offer convincing arguments and compelling ideas, but he remains a liar and the father of lies. Let's learn an important lesson from this account: **DON'T BELIEVE THE DEVIL'S COMPELLING LIES.**

The book of Joshua chronicles for us the conquest of the land that the Lord had promised to his people. Moses, the man who had led the people of Israel so faithfully and well for so many years, did not have the privilege of leading them into the land of Canaan. Instead, his successor Joshua would serve in that way. After miraculously walking through the Jordan River on dry ground, the people of Israel came to the first city in the land – the city of Jericho. It was a large, well-protected city, but that didn't matter, because the Lord was on the side of his people. Before the people of Israel ever drew near, the people of Jericho were melting with fear, because they had heard about the Lord's power in rescuing the people of Israel from Egypt some forty years before this. The Lord directed Joshua to march around the city of Jericho with all the men, once a day, for six days, with the ark of the covenant in the middle of the procession. On the seventh day, they

were to march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. Then all the people were to give a loud shout and, the Lord promised, the wall of the city would collapse.

Joshua carried out the Lord's directives, having the army march around the city once each day. On the seventh day, on the seventh time around the city, Joshua gave these instructions in chapter 6: *"Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. . . . 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. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury."* The Lord wanted his people to give the plunder from the first victory to him. It wasn't because he had his eye on a new mansion and needed a down payment. Instead he wanted to teach the people to trust him to provide everything that they needed for body and life. When the people shouted, the Lord did just as he said – he caused the walls to tumble down.

You can imagine the confidence that such a victory would have given to the people of Israel. They were certain that no one could stand up to the Lord and that they would defeat any and every enemy. In the opening portion of chapter seven, we see that confidence in action. Joshua sent spies to check out the region of Ai. The spies came back with a positive report – it was a small area and the men of Ai would have no chance at all against the people of Israel. So they didn't need to send a large force to take the area. Only something shocking happened. The three thousand that went up to Ai were routed. Thirty-six men died. That formerly burgeoning confidence became a dwindling confidence – the people of Israel were afraid of what was going to happen next.

When Joshua turned to the Lord in prayer after the setback, the Lord revealed why the people of Israel were routed at Ai. *"Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies."* The Lord had meant what he had said. He wanted them to show him the honor of returning the plunder of this victory

to him and trust that he would provide. They had failed.

The Lord even told Joshua what he was to do. The next morning he was to have all of the tribes of Israel present themselves before the Lord. The Lord would then reveal who had taken the devoted things. That's where we pick it up in the verses before us. The two and a half million-strong people of Israel stood before the Lord. In one way or another, perhaps by the equivalent of picking names from a hat, the Lord revealed exactly who it was that had violated the covenant. After what must have taken a fair amount of time, the Lord revealed the culprit. It was Achan.

Joshua approached Achan and said, *"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."* Joshua's words indicate his concern both for Achan and the people of Israel. "Give glory to the Lord," he says. In other words, "Acknowledge that it was not by chance that you were identified as the culprit and the cause of the defeat we experienced. Give the Lord the credit of knowing that you are indeed the one."

Achan acknowledged what he had done. *"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."*

Achan had believed the devil's compelling lies. The first lie must have gone something like this: "No one will know. There's no one taking an inventory of the wealth of Jericho. If just a little isn't handed over to the Lord no one will know the difference." As with most of the compelling lies that the devil tells, there was a kernel of truth in it. No one did know what Achan had done. Joshua and the other leaders assumed that the Lord's direction had been carried out perfectly. But, there was one who did know! The Lord knew.

While the devil is cunning and clever, he tends to use some temptations over and over, including this one: "No one will know." "No one will know if you take a glance at another student's test to get the right answers. No one will know if you take that money that's sitting out in the open for anyone to take. No one will know if you check out some internet sites that are not fit for a Christian. No one will know." That's a lie. Though we may be able to hide our sins from the world, we cannot hide them from God. He sees everything that we do, even if it's in the privacy of our own room, with no other eyes around. That

you and I have fallen for such a lie, "No one will know," reveals a couple of things, doesn't it? First, that the devil is indeed a master liar. We know that God is everywhere at the same time and yet the devil leads us to believe that God doesn't know what we do. The second thing we have to recognize is our gullibility. We'll believe just about anything when it's what we want to believe.

Here's another lie that Achan must have believed: "Even if someone finds out (which they won't), no one is going to be hurt by this." When Achan looked at the robe that was going to be tossed into a fire, the devil said, "No one will be hurt if you take that beautiful robe; it's just going to be destroyed anyway." He couldn't have been more wrong. It was Achan's disobedience that brought the Lord's wrath down upon the people. It was Achan's sin that caused 36 men to lose their lives in Ai.

The devil uses the same lie today: "No one is going to be hurt by this. Your private life is private. It's yours and yours alone." That's simply not true. Our sin hurts others. Sometimes that's obvious. If I take something that belongs to another and they have to go without as a result, my sin has hurt others. If you are unfaithful to your spouse, your sin hurts your spouse. At other times, it's not so obvious immediately. Maybe you're so busy with life that you have no time left for private study of God's Word. Fail to feed yourself with the Word, and you will not be as willing or able to serve those the Lord wants to bless through you. Maybe you're so busy that you don't ever spend any time with your family, or when you do you might as well not be there because you're mentally absent. You're hurting your family, because you're robbing them of what the Lord wants to give them through you.

Here's another compelling lie that the devil used on Achan: "The Lord wants you to be happy; if you have this extra wealth, you'll be happy." Again, there's a teeny, tiny kernel of truth in that statement. One could say that the Lord desires for his people to be happy. Happiness, however, is found only in obedience to the Lord and his commands. Happiness is not found in wealth. We hear stories all the time about people who have struck it rich that have miserable, unhappy lives. Yet we stand in line, saying, "I'd like to find out for myself if some extra wealth would make me happy. I'm willing to be a guinea pig in that experiment." Worse, we constantly strive for that next toy, that better house, that nicer car, that more prestigious position, because we think that happiness comes from what we have. Why is it that Americans spend, on average, more than they make? Because they believe happiness comes from having what others have. Why are we willing to

throw money at this, that, and the other thing, but hold on for dear life when it comes time to determine what we will give for our offerings? When we act as if the proper possessions will give meaning and purpose to our lives, we push Jesus to the curb and say, "Forgiveness and eternal life are great and all, but they don't compare to having this new computer or these clothes and this nice house."

One more lie that the devil told Achan. "Even if God knows about what you do, he's a forgiving God. Nothing will happen to you." Again, a kernel of truth. God does forgive. He is slow to anger and rich in mercy. But the devil is a liar. Something did happen to Achan. *"Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son 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."* There were consequences to Achan's action. Serious consequences, and not just for himself. While it's hard to make a definitive statement, it sure seems that his family suffered for his sin, too. They almost certainly became accessories to his crime after the fact when he had to hide the wealth he had stolen. They died. He died.

How often doesn't the devil recite that same line to you? "Don't worry about it; God will forgive you. Nothing will happen." The devil encourages us to put forgiveness in our pocket like a "get out of jail free" card. "The more you sin, the more forgiveness you get," he argues, "so stop trying to do what God commands." The reality is that there are consequences to the sins we commit. Some are obvious consequences. Steal from your boss and you get fired. Cheat on your spouse and you ruin your marriage. There are other consequences that are not so obvious and yet oh-so-dangerous. Fall into temptation and you have just provided your enemy a round of ammunition. Every sin you commit allows the devil to put another round in his weapon. He can assail you with the question for which you will have no answer: "Do you think that God will forgive you when you have taken advantage of his forgiveness?"

Achan confessed his sin. He held nothing back. He did not in any way defend his action; he didn't blame it on a difficult childhood. But still he died. In other words, confessing your sin doesn't earn you a free pass. Confessing your sin doesn't earn you the forgiveness of your sins. Your confession does not satisfy the God of justice. The God of justice demands that sinners be punished. He demands that all who believe the devil's lies suffer the devil's punishment.

That would include you and me, who have often believed the devil's compelling lies. We need to acknowledge that we have brought down upon ourselves the Lord's fierce anger.

Achan was put to death. But did you hear what happened afterwards? It's in verse 26: *"Then the Lord turned away from his fierce anger."* When the sinner was destroyed the Lord turned away from his fierce anger. Isn't that what happened at Calvary? Outside of the city, the Lord destroyed the sinner – his Son, who had taken upon himself the sins of the world. The Father considered Jesus the sinner of sinners. He forsook his Son at the cross and made him endure the very pain of hell. The One who had consistently resisted the devil's temptations and refused to believe the devil's lies received the punishment assigned to those who had believed the devil. Because of that willing sacrifice of Christ, the Lord has turned away from his fierce anger. He exacted the punishment for the world's sins, including yours and mine, on Jesus. He has given to you the perfect obedience of Christ. He looks at you and sees you as the One who refused to believe the devil's lies. He has declared you righteous.

So long as you live in this world, you live in the territory of your enemy, the devil. He will never stop in his attempts to destroy you. He will tell you lie after lie, and then for good measure, he will lie some more. When he succeeds, and leads you to sin, all to say, "See, you are not a child of God and can never be one," don't believe his compelling lie. Listen instead to the Scripture and how it describes Jesus. He was *"tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."* His obedience is your obedience before God; you are righteous because of Christ. That you can believe, because while the devil always lies, God never does.