

Title: When Church is Dangerous – pt.2
Text: 1 Corinthians 11.17-22
Theme: Playing games with the holy stuff
Series: 1 Corinthians #49
Prop Stmt.

Build a Fire – This week, the president pulled off a huge surprise, he understands the importance of momentum. We things are going great – disasters fade in view, but when things are going bad victories are ignored. It is enormously difficult to turn the tide

Build a Bridge - The affect of momentum on athletics, an army, a nation

When Israel came out of Egypt, they appeared to be unstoppable. They had watched the crumbling of the most powerful empire on the earth at the time take place as the bodies of the Egyptian army floated down the Red Sea. They sang, they danced, they rejoiced and headed to Mt. Sinai to learn about God. For the next 38 years, they stumbled around and wasted their lives. They had a land waiting for them just miles away that they could not get because they were not willing to follow God. Over and over their failure to truly follow God created a culture of defeat and problems. Bickering, conflicts, jealousies, probably made Moses wonder if these people would ever amount to anything, or were they going to self-destruct right there in the desert. Slowly, they began to learn their lesson. An entire generation of unbelieving complainers had to die off, and in their place arose a new generation that seemed more willing to obey. The book of Deuteronomy opens up with the nation of Israel moving. Externally, they were moving toward a point on the Eastern side of the land of Canaan, that would serve as the launching point of their invasion. Internally they were moving in harmony with God. Often overlooked are a couple of battles that took place on the western side of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. Israel defeated the armies of Sihon and then Og. These events were a huge boost to the confidence of Israel. Then the crossing of the Jordan River and the defeat of Jericho were Red Sea kind of miracles. These people were now unstoppable. Perhaps now, more than at any time since the Red Sea, the nation of Israel was finally gaining some altitude and positive momentum.

Then, they hit Ai. Ai against Israel is like your 8 year old's AYSO soccer team going up against the Check's national team. It is a joke, a laughter, a, "why are we bothering with this?" event. And then, the unthinkable happened – defeat! Little Ai took on mighty Israel and embarrassed them, humiliated them, and defeated them. The unstoppable, were vulnerable.

If you have read the historical record of Joshua, you know why. In preparation for the battle of Jericho, God had given to the people, explicit orders. He told them that they were embarking on the conquest of the land. The result of this conquest would be that God would give them an entire nation full of farms they had not planted, homes they had not built, and cities they had not designed. Unlike our forefathers who came to a wilderness untamed and wild, the nation of Israel was given an incredible gift. But, God said, before you can take it, you have to give to me first. The first city that you face is the

city of Jericho. In that city there will be many spoils from your victory, do not touch them, take them or use them as your own, for they are mine. They are holy. They are set apart for me. The gold, silver, the articles of bronze and iron were put into the treasury for the Lord and his future tabernacle and temple. God always demands that you give Him the first, the best, because it is a statement of your actual trust in Him. Israel, it seemed was in no mood to disobey God. For 40 years now, they had been having funerals for family members of the previous generation who had not obeyed. The land between them and Egypt was littered with graves. They obeyed – except one man. Just, one man - Achan. Forever, the mention of his name makes one want to spit it out quickly and rid your mouth of its pronunciation, lest somehow its very mention contaminates you with the same sin. It is a bitter name.

Achan had dared to disobey God. Like Adam and Eve before him, he looked, he desired, he took, and then he died. When lust conceives, it brings forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. There is no such thing as a little bit of lust. In the rubble of Jericho, Achan saw a wedge of gold, a pile of silver and an expensive robe from Babylon. He took them and hid them. The occasion of his sin brought about the loss of 38 men on the hills surrounding Ai. 38 families were having funerals. Wives lost husbands, children lost dads, mothers lost sons because Achan wanted some stuff that belonged to God. When his sin was discovered, Achan and his wife and his children were killed.

I remember as a child reading this account and thinking that it was not fair that his kids had to be killed just because the dad sinned. I am also tempted to look at this through the eyes of Joshua. I know how important it is for an organization, a church, to cultivate a culture of good momentum – a sense that we are going in the right direction. You see it – don't you? Joshua's utter disbelief of – this couldn't happen to us – could it, you can relate to the thinking of – “God, we didn't need this to happen.” “We were just really starting to make progress here – and now this!” Can't I catch a break? No wonder Moses about lost his mind with these people!!! But I miss the whole point if I only look at this through the eyes of a child, or through the eyes of a leader. History is His story. The world is God's stage. We have to see life through the lenses of His eyes. God is so true, so holy, so pure, and so right that He cannot and will not overlook sin. When God says, this is holy – you don't mess with it. It is very clear. You can rationalize all that you want. You can weave your way through turning and twisting mazes of the psychological attempts of explaining the motivation that led up to the act, but it all boils down to this. Achan wanted and took what God said – NO! He did not care about what happened to the rest of the nation. He did not care about what happened to the 38 families who were digging graves for their loved ones. He saw, he wanted, he took because he was in it for himself. That my friends brought death in Eden, in Ai, in Samson, in Saul, in the church of Jerusalem and in the church at Corinth. God does not tolerate division and God does not tolerate hypocrisy by His people. The God of Israel in Ai is the same God of the church in Corinth and the same God of this church. He is a jealous God and if you play games with obedience you may pay for it with your very life. Some of the believers in the church at Corinth used the ordinance of the Lord's Supper as a pretense for their arrogance. The wealthy members of the church arrived early and ate

(devoured?) their food leaving scraps for the poor, and small amounts to drink. By the time the rest of the people gathered, some of the inner circle, elite were already drunk.

1. God does not tolerate division in His Church (17-19)

In our study of verses 17-19 we began to see how the people in the church at Corinth had divided themselves up on the basis of who was in and who was out. The differences were cosmetic, surface stuff based on who had money and who didn't. There are legitimate differences in the church, but there are not legitimate divisions in the church. In other words, there are different genders, different gifts, different offices, and different ministries. These are legitimate differences. In this context I am saying that there is a difference between differences and divisions. We may differ in race, but not in creed. We may differ in gender, but not in status. We may differ in zip code, but not in standing. We may differ in education, but not in salvation. We may differ in age, and experience, but we are not divided in Christ. Most of the things that the world divides over is not a basis for division and groupings in the church. Christ destroyed man-made divisions. That is why God does not tolerate division in His Church. But God has not destroyed all division.

The truth is: God sees people in distinct categories. He sees people as either genuine followers of Jesus Christ who have come to God on His terms, or He sees them as condemned sinners, regardless of religious label, moral reputation, nationality or family name. Just because a person attends church does not make that person a follower of Christ. Showing up in this building on Sunday morning does not make you a Christian anymore than walking through a garage turns you into a car. So, God sees the hearts of people. He knows those who are true followers of Him and the rest who are not. While all of that is true, I do not think that v.19 is saying that. There are basically two ways we can interpret this verse. Paul could be quoting some of the Corinthians who were justifying their selfish divisions in the church by saying, "Look it is inevitable that there are divisions. The world has always had divisions. If the church has the rich who eat in here and the poor who eat in there, God simply made us all that way, so accept it. Anthony Thiselton reflects this understanding in his translation of this verse.

"For 'dissensions are unavoidable,' it is claimed among you, in order that those who are tried and true among you may be visibly revealed." It is also possible that Paul is being very sarcastic and is rebuking them sharply by saying, **"Of course there has to be divisions among you in order to show off which of you are approved by God!"**

While both of these are possible, I lean to the second, since Paul is clearly very, very upset and rightfully so. These are strong words. And they should be because, the manner in which we gather says more about what we believe than what the speaker says. If a guest comes in here and no one speaks to that guest, and I preach on the fact that one of the evidences of the life of Christ in our lives is the love that we have for others, what is this guest to conclude? If a brother or sister comes with a very heavy heart and everyone is too busy to pray with him or her, and no one provides some caring and encouraging counsel, what is the message that we are preaching? That brother or sister will not care

one lick about what I say, if there is no follow through in our lives. That is why Paul says in v.20 – You may be calling it church, but it ain't church.

Actually he says, “When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat.”

2. God does not tolerate hypocrisy in His Church (20-22)

You are calling this the Lord's Supper, this isn't the Lord's Supper, all that you are doing is getting together to eat and drink. Just because you call it the Lord's Supper does not make it the Lord's Supper. Brothers and sisters, labels only have value, if what you are doing is consistent with what the Bible says it is.

Case in point. One of the early presidential contenders on the Republican side is a Mormon. Of course this has political pundits wondering, how is this going to play with the evangelical crowd, which has historically viewed the Mormon religion as a cult. What pundits may not know, is that the evangelical crowd is so theological lazy and biblically ignorant that most would not know a cult if it introduced itself with a business card and power point presentation. Recently, this contender was asked about his faith by a “born-again Christian” and the Mormon presidential hopeful replied that “Jesus is my Savior.” Well, for one born-again Christian that was all he needed to hear and he was happy. Sometimes I yell at the TV, this week I was yelling at the newspaper and I was yelling at this naïve, and biblically illiterate believer. “Has every theological marble completely rolled out of your apparently empty head?” Now Mormons are usually nice, moral, hard-working people. And frankly, the guy might make a good president. You see, when it comes to politics, since America is not the great hope of the world, and is not the kingdom of God, I would rather be ruled by a competent pagan or a competent unbeliever than an incompetent Christian. My point is not political, it is theological. The Mormon Jesus is not the Jesus of the Bible. Just because someone says Jesus, or God may mean nothing more than a truckload of asparagus. Again, just because someone calls it baptism, does not mean that it is baptism. And in this text, Paul is clear, you call it Lord's Supper, but what you are doing is not the Lord's Supper. Instead of celebrating your unity, you are exacerbating her differences. Listen, we bring our surface differences with us into the church. We have to work at our unity. We have to spend time listening to each other, praying with and for each other, working together, growing together, serving together, of course worshiping together. Unity is not automatic. But, if we say, here are the old people's pews. Here are the Asian pews. Here are the Latino pews. Here are the African-American pews. Here are the white collar pews. Here are the blue collar pews. And then each group takes communion on their own? That's nuts! It is wrong.

The question of v.22 has echoed in my heart as a warning. Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? Church is not an opportunity to advance myself or my image. Church is your family, my family of believers who live under the Sovereign and gracious oversight of King Jesus. If I despise the church by treating His sheep as if they have no value, I am despising the Lord who died for these people.

The truth is, there are some people in the church who the world would label as “high maintenance.” They can drive you crazy – can’t they?! So, what do we do? The choice appears, 1) Disobey God by ignoring these people and keeping your sanity or 2) Obey God and lose your mind because you have to become friends with hopelessly, needy people. There is a third way. “Needy people” “High maintenance people” need to grow up. They need the church. They need you. They need me. But they need us, not so that we can prop them up for the rest of their lives, but they need us to call them to grow up, stand up, and lean on Christ. The most loving thing I can do with a high-maintenance person is help them grow-up in Christ. If they do not want do that, then they will not be comfortable around here.

But that isn’t the point of this particular text. The rich were not overwhelmed with the demands of the needy poor. The rich were acting as if they were better. They despised the very people that Christ had saved. We expect that from the world. That sort of stuff is all that they have. Our unity is deeper. Our unity is eternal. We are called to live like it.