

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Joshua 6: 9/11 Ten Year Anniversary
Sunday, September 11, 2011

1. Remembering 9/11
 - a. It is hard to believe that it has been 10 years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Much like many of you can remember where you were when Kennedy was assassinated, 9/11 is a day that is seared in the memories of most of us. It is strange to think that my kids weren't alive and have no context to understand it.
 - b. When the attacks happened, I was in my first couple of weeks of seminary. It was a Tuesday morning and I was in the basement of the chapel at Trinity for my Spiritual Formation class. Pam Powell, the professor, was late and so we had some time to kill and somehow someone in the class had heard about the first plane hitting the first WTC building.
 - c. The rest of that day and the ensuing days were a blur. We were all in a panic, not knowing what was going on. Classes were cancelled and we were called to the chapel for a prayer service. I remember talking on the phone to my mother and her telling me that she loved me. And when she did, I just broke down and cried.
 - i. I never doubted my mother's love for me, but we weren't a family who regularly said that to each other. The full gravity of 9/11 smacked me in the face when I realized that things were so bad that my mother felt the need to tell me that she loved me.
 - d. Of course then came the time to sort out what happened. Who attacked? Were there more planes that we didn't know about? Had the hostages on the planes done anything to fight back? Little by little we began to get answers to these questions. And for the first time in my lifetime, for a few months anyway, virtually all Americans were united. To a person, every American wanted to know who was responsible for killing almost 3000 Americans, and more importantly, why had they done it.
 - e. It didn't take long for us begin hearing that this was God's judgment on America (thanks Jerry Falwell), or that we were being punished for turning our backs on God as a nation.
2. The difference between Judgment, Punishment, and Consequences
 - a. I don't think this question has really ever been answered for us. Some assume that 9/11 was God's judgment on America. Others assume that it is the natural consequence of religious extremism.
 - b. To understand this, though, I think we need to get a better understanding of the difference between three difference concepts: judgment, punishment, and consequences.
 - c. Judgment is what we see in our passage from Joshua for today. It is God's righteous act of bringing justice and his vengeance upon those who deserve it. Throughout the bible we hear of God's judgment. There is the judgment of the nations, in particular those occupying the Promised Land. There is the judgment of God on his throne at the final resurrection of the dead.

- d. In this case, we have Israel serving as God's hand of judgment against Jericho. The entire conquest of the Promised Land was about God's righteous judgment on an extremely sinful people. Israel wasn't the one bringing judgment. They were only the means through which God brought it about. And he was clear that Israel wasn't chosen because of its own merit, but because God himself chose to set them aside for his own glory.
- e. So when he sent them into the Promised Land, he wasn't sending them as people without sin to bring judgment on those with sin. He was sending them as people set aside for himself to bring his much deserved wrath on some of the most vile people who ever lived.
- f. I know it is harsh, especially on the anniversary of 9/11, to hear about the extreme and permanent destruction of a whole city of people. But that is because we read about these things apart from their context and we read our politically correct sensibilities back into them.
- g. The nations and cities that were being displaced and destroyed in Palestine weren't just ungodly. They were evil. They worshiped gods such as Molek, who demanded child sacrifice. Babies and children would be placed inside a bronze statue with a fire lit under it and literally cook the children alive as an act of worship. They also practiced bestiality, which, for the sake of the children present, I won't discuss further. However, when you realize that they practiced such things, it becomes clear why they were commanded to destroy every animal- you don't want such an animal living among humans.
- h. Why would God want no one, even the children, left alive? Has anyone ever had a teenager before? They aren't easy to handle, are they? Can you imagine adopting a young child from the town you just destroyed and having them grow up to learn why you adopted them?
- i. Ok, so that is judgment. God found these people guilty of egregious sin and decided that it was time for them to face their penalty. What about punishment?
- j. Punishment is what we see in the next chapter. God had commanded the people of Israel to not take anything from Jericho, but to destroy everything. Yet one man, Achan, decided to steal just a bit of the wealth. Before Joshua knew that this had taken place, he sent out spies to the next city they were to take, Ai. When their spies went, thirty-six were killed.
- k. When Joshua asked why, God told him that it was because they had disobeyed his command to take nothing from Jericho. So Joshua sought the perpetrator, and when he was found and admitted his guilt, he was stoned by the Israelites.
- l. This served as punishment, not judgment, because instead of being a final decision to deal with Israel's sin, it was instead a brief period of suffering and discipline for the purposes of bringing about repentance within the nation. It was meant to change minds and bring people back, whereas judgment isn't meant to have a redemptive element.
- m. And finally we have consequences. The consequence for Achan for disobeying was that he was stoned. God punished all of Israel for disobedience. Joshua, as their leader, was greatly distressed and sought to right the wrong- and thus the punishment worked. Even Achan, upon being found out, repented of his sin. Yet

the consequences of breaking the law in this manner was to face his just penalty- a punishment in this case that was final, but that came even after he repented.

- n. So the consequence wasn't the same as judgment, because it wasn't meant for the final destruction of Achan, nor was it punishment in the sense that it wasn't in order to bring about repentance. Instead it was the direct result of choices Achan made and behaviors that he took part in.
3. So which, if any, was 9/11
- a. All of that said, how should we best understand 9/11? It is really tough to say, or to even talk about. On one hand, the victims of 9/11 were innocent. They did nothing to Osama Bin Laden to deserve their deaths. On the other hand, they, like all humans, are were guilty of rebellion against God. So they were innocent on the issue- dealings with Islam- but none of us are actually innocent people.
 - b. However I would argue that 9/11 wasn't God's judgment for two reasons. First, God's judgment on nations is final. He destroyed the nations he intended to judge. The very fact that America still stands after those attacks is evidence that it wasn't God's judgment.
 - c. Second, God's judgment in the bible was always spelled out with by God in specific words. "This group of people are guilty of these things." No such revelation accompanied 9/11 for America.
 - d. I would also say that it wasn't God's punishment for two reasons. First, America isn't the New Israel. We aren't God's people living in the land flowing with milk and honey, called to serve as a light to the nations. This isn't to say that we aren't a blessed nation. It is simply to say that America has never been called by God to be the specific representative of him.
 - e. And there is a good reason for this. After Christ, membership in God's family was no longer about blood-line but about faith. People from every nation and tongue become a part of the New Israel- the heritage of God's people. America doesn't have, and never has had a specific claim on that.
 - f. Second, God's punishment on his people in the bible has always been accompanied by very specific courses of action to follow in order to avoid the punishment. "Repent, abandon your idols, turn from your sins, and you will be saved." We received no such warnings before or after 9/11. So in the biblical sense of punishment upon sinful people to lead them back to repentance, it doesn't meet the criteria.
 - g. That leaves consequences. Is it fair to say that 9/11 was a consequence of some action or inaction? Before I say that, let me say this about consequences: it isn't to say, "Did we get what we deserved?" That isn't the question. Consequences come from just about everything, and some are good while others are bad. A good consequence to asking Bonnie to marry me was that I get to spend the rest of my (or her) life with her. The bad consequence to my asking Bonnie to marry me is that my brother had been dating his girlfriend for three years at the time and was mad that he never proposed and she ended up breaking up with him.
 - h. So with that understanding, can we see 9/11 as a consequence of something, and if so, what? I would say that it is a very unfortunate consequence of American specifically, but in general Western indifference to Islam. This by no means implies that the people who died on that day deserved it. In fact, not a single one

of them did. It was a terrible, painful, heart-wrenching day that we will never forget.

- i. But it can't be denied that Islam has been an extremely oppressive and violent religion since its inception in the 7th century. If not for Charlemagne and one battle, all of Europe would have fallen to the Muslims 1000 years ago. Since then, public policy has been to ignore Islam as much as possible and hopefully it won't interfere with us. And despite the terrible tragedy of 9/11, Europe is paying a bigger price for that indifference as within a generation Muslims will be the majority in many if not most European nations.
- j. Think about the point. Indifference. What is the consequence- the logical end result- of our indifference for so long on protecting marriage? We will soon have same sex marriage in most states, and there are already lawsuits underway to allow for the legalization of polygamy.
- k. What is consequence of our indifference on the issue of abortion? Every day in this country 3500 babies are aborted. That is more than a 9/11 every day in America. And as Mike Huckabee pointed out, is it any surprise that we can't pay for social security at this point when we have aborted an entire generation of people who would be paying into that system. Again- there is a consequence.
- l. And thus we see how the consequence of ignoring Islam could be so extreme. Indifference is so damning. Thus why Jesus told the church in Laodicea that he would spit them out for being lukewarm- indifferent.
- m. We are not called to be indifferent as Christians. We are called to passionately and zealously live for Christ. We are called to worship him whole heartedly. We are called to take up our crosses and follow him. Even that image- taking up your cross- makes it utterly impossible to be indifferent and be a Christian.
- n. We can't be indifferent to other religions, especially violent and oppressive ones, just because they oppress people in other parts of the world. We can't be indifferent about issues such as abortion. We have already lose roughly 1.3 million babies every year to abortion just in this country alone. We can't be indifferent to "lifestyle choices and behaviors" when they will undermine the very fabric of society.
- o. Indifference on a grand scale led us to 9/11. It led us to 3000 innocent people senselessly dying. And while we can't get those people back, here on this tenth anniversary of that terrible tragedy, we can recommit ourselves to a passionate faith that shuns indifference and says that such injustice will not happen on my watch. Such indifference will not be my way. For I walk with the Lord.