

Hiding or Hidden?

Joshua 6:1; Colossians 3:1-3

“98, 99, 100! Ready or not, here I come!”

You’ll recognize that as being from a favorite children’s game called “Hide and Seek.” It’s a simple little game that probably every one of us has played. It requires no special skills, no particular equipment, and can be played just about anywhere there’s a place to hide. There’s only one rule: if you’re “it,” you can’t peek to see where everyone else is hiding.

It’s a cute little children’s game, but it is not so cute when those who have passed out of childhood into their teenage and adult years play spiritual hide and seek. You know the game; probably everyone of us has played that version, too. Unlike the children’s version, there are no rules. God is always “It” and those who play this game run as far and as fast as they can to hide from God.

It’s a common diversion. You can go back to the book of Genesis, and you will read these words in the third chapter: “*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden*” (Genesis 3:8).

And we’ve been hiding ever since.

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The Hebrew people had been threatening for quite some time. The rumors had been flying concerning their numbers, their intentions, and what their God had done for them. After a delay, they were finally inside the land of Canaan, and the rumors began to take on a ring of horrible truth.

The people of Jericho were especially concerned. Spies had entered their city, and then escaped. This much the people knew, and they reacted in much the same way you and I do when we are threatened by something unknown or unfamiliar to us: they retreated. They retreated inside the apparent safety provided by the double-walls of Jericho. In fact, the Bible says in Joshua 6:1 that “*Jericho was tightly shut up,*” so tightly that “*no one went out and no one came in.*” The construction of the original Hebrew indicates that the gates were fortified with bars of iron; one form of the word used here means “to imprison.” The citizens of Jericho did their best to

hide behind the walls of their city, so much so that they imprisoned themselves inside their city to escape the Israelites.

I admit it isn't very flattering, but some of us this morning are even now, at this very moment, trying to hide from God. And we are doing it by erecting imaginary walls around our lives. We can look closely at the fortified city of Jericho, shut up tightly, and we can see ourselves, trying to escape the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. We essentially have imprisoned ourselves behind whatever bars we can find, thinking that if we stay behind them long enough that God won't come after us. The words we would use to describe the Jerichoites also describe us with uncanny accuracy. Behind what kind of walls are we hiding? Let's describe a few of them. Let's imagine that Jericho had four walls—let's name each of them.

1 The first wall is named "Fear"

If they were anything, these citizens of Jericho were afraid. Wouldn't we be? Archaeologists tell us that the ancient city of Jericho was six to nine acres in area. Its population consisted of only a few thousand inhabitants. The Hebrews were two million strong, counting of course, those who could not fight in battle. We read in Joshua 5:1 that *"When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the seacoast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts sank and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites."* They were afraid!

Fear may be the very reason you are trying to hide from God right now. You may be afraid of what living for Christ will cost you. You may be afraid of what your circle of friends will say about you or to you. You may be afraid of the power of the Holy Spirit, as He probes the secret places of your heart and convicts you of sin. You may be afraid to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior because the Christ-life is unfamiliar territory, or because you are afraid you will turn into a wild-eyed fanatic.

You're not the first to feel that way. In fact, when Adam and Eve sinned, one of the first things they did was to try to hide from God. When God went looking for Adam, calling *"Where are you?"* Adam answered, *"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid"* (Genesis 3:9-10). The book of Acts tells of the time when the apostle Paul appeared before Felix, the Roman governor. We read in Acts 24:25, *"As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'"*

Felix, like you perhaps, was hiding behind a wall of fear.

2 The second wall is named “Delusion”

From our perspective all these years later, we can see how futile the attempts of the Jerichoites were. This was the God who had parted the waters of the Red Sea and then, forty years later, stopped the flow of the Jordan River when it was at flood stage. This was the God who would one day enter the scene of human history by becoming one of us through a miraculous birth.

This was the God who, as a human, would die a horrible death, and then conquer death victoriously three days later. This was the God who would open prison doors without a key for the apostle Peter. These people in Jericho had heard of the mighty things God had done for His people while they had still been in Egypt, and in the forty years since when they had been wandering around in the wilderness. They knew of the Lord God’s power, but they deceived themselves into thinking that they could resist Him and His people by merely closing the city gates! Surely their walls would protect them!

Before you laugh too loudly, look at your own heart. Have you deceived yourself into thinking that you can have fullness of life without Christ? Are you living under the delusion that God is too good to send you to hell? Are your possessions, your popularity or your philosophy deceiving you to accept a way other than The Way?

Jesus once told a parable in which a certain farmer grew such a large crop that he didn’t have room for the harvest. He thought to himself, *“What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.”* Then he said, *“This is what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”* But God said to him, *“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”* (Luke 12:16b-20).

Jesus said to the church at Laodicea: *“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked”* (Revelation 3:17). You are deceiving yourselves, He was telling them.

There are several ways we deceive ourselves. We are warned in Galatians 6:3, *“If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”* First John

1:8 reads, “*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*” And in the letter of James: “*If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless*” (James 1:26).

3 The third wall is named “Procrastination”

Ouch! This one hits us all. It certainly clobbers me! Procrastination can be defined as “an attempt to delay the inevitable.” A few years ago *Reader’s Digest* carried a little story that illustrates this for us beautifully. Denise Knott of Kaukauna, Wisconsin, wrote that she had had an unusually hectic weekend, and she decided to put off housework until Monday. She was just curling up with a book when old friends phoned. They were in town and they would be by in a few minutes!

She tore around the house, dusting and vacuuming. Time was running out when she reached the kitchen, so she grabbed piles of dishes and crammed them into the oven.

Just in time, too. The doorbell rang, and there stood her old friends—with a frozen pizza! Ms. Knott was only delaying the inevitable!

That’s what the Jerichoites were doing: they were attempting to delay the inevitable defeat at the hands of the Hebrews. Surely they knew they could not withstand the attack of that many people! Their efforts to defend their city were at best feeble attempts to put off their defeat just a little longer.

Perhaps you’ve been putting off repenting of personal sin and accepting Jesus as Lord of your life. Perhaps you are a Christian, but sin has crept into your heart until you are no longer a vessel fit for use in the Master’s household. But procrastination on a spiritual level is not just an attempt to delay the inevitable. On the spiritual plane, procrastination can go on and on. You can resist the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in your life for as long as you live. It is *not* inevitable that you will be saved, or if saved, that you will return to the Heavenly Father. *You* will decide that.

But one day, your knee will bow before Jesus Christ the Lord. That *is* inevitable! One day your tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is inevitable. You will bow before Jesus as a child of God, or you will bow before Jesus as a doomed sinner.

No, we don't like hearing words like these in our day, do we? But what does the Bible say? "*Anyone...who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*" (James 4:17). That includes a lot of things, but it certainly includes the decision you have resisted making, thinking that perhaps next week or next year, or when you are older, you will surrender to the Lord. The Bible says that if you know you should, and don't, all you have done is add to your sin.

Every sin-laden heart is a Jericho shut up. You are trying to hide behind walls that appear to be fortified and strong. But across the face of the walls around your heart are the words, "fear," "delusion," and "procrastination."

But wait a minute—what about the fourth wall? That's the one **you** name. That fourth wall would be anything that stands between you and God. You know what it is, so you name that one. If your relationship with God is not right, then you know why already. If your relationship with another person is not right, you know the reason for that one, too.

But today, the Lord can cause the walls around your heart to collapse, as you invite Him to invade your heart with His conquering presence and power. It's a remarkable thing, but once we cease to run **from** God and being our journey **back to** God, instead of **hiding** from God, we find that we are **hidden** by God. This morning, everyone of us falls into one of those two categories: hiding or hidden.

Which are you?

Today, instead of **hiding from God**, you can be **hidden in Christ**. The Bible says in the book of Colossians, "*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now **hidden** with Christ in God*" (Colossians 3:1-3). You may be hiding, when God says you can be hidden!

Then you will know the safety and security that only Christ can bring. Your fear can be gloriously replaced with rejoicing as your sins are wiped away. Your delusion will give way to the illumination of the Holy Spirit, flooding your heart and life with the truth of the Gospel. That sinful procrastination can fall before the fulfillment of a resolute, conclusive, firm decision to follow Christ with all your life, for the rest of your life.

In this game of spiritual hide and seek, God is “It.” And the count-down has started for the day when Jesus will return. One day you will hear the trump of God and the voice of the archangel, and I wonder if he will say something like:

“Ready or not, here He comes!” And there will be no place to hide.

When He does come, will He find you *hiding from God* or *hidden in Christ*?