

Thesis: **Hidden rebellion will always sabotage hell-razing!**

There are times when we do not need to pray.

I know that can sound wrong, maybe even heretical. You may be already arguing with me in your mind. How can there be a time I do not need to pray? Didn't Jesus teach that we always ought to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1)? Does not the Apostle Paul tell us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? And what about James, who tells us to pray when we are suffering, sing psalms when we are cheerful, and pray and have others pray when we are sick (James 5:13-16)? Pastor, how can you possibly say there are times when we do not need to pray? Haven't you been teaching us to raze hell, and haven't you said that we need to be grounded in the word of God and persistent in prayer if we are to raze hell? What gives, dude?

Nevertheless, I will say it again: **There are times when we do not need to pray**, even times that God would tell us to stop praying.

Before we move to our text for the day, let me give you a couple of examples. Imagine a professing Christian, a person who has declared that Jesus is Lord of their lives, confronting the imperative of believer's baptism. Let's imagine they are speaking to their pastor, and this is what they are saying: "I am praying about being baptized!" What should a loving pastor say? I think this might be appropriate: **You don't have to pray about obeying God.** I believe an honest reading of the New Testament will clearly bring a person to understand that believer's baptism is what was practiced and taught in the early church. At the end of His earthly mission, Jesus taught us that we are to go into all the world and make disciples, and that we are to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). On the Day of Pentecost, 3000 heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit used Peter's preaching to bring conviction to their hearts, so much so that they cried out saying: *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* (Acts 2:37). What did Peter say? *Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ* (Acts 2:38). And they obeyed! They did not need to pray when God gave them a command, and neither do we! **You don't have to pray to obey!**

One more example: Here is a young man and a young lady. Let's assume that one or both of them are professing Christians. They have been dating for some time, and they begin to talk about moving in together, setting up house-keeping, if you will. Imagine, now, one of them saying: "We need to pray about this before we take this step." In spite of the fact that by doing so they are 50% more likely to divorce if they ever marry; in spite of the fact that assuming the privileges of marriage without the corresponding responsibility is an irresponsible act, they still feel compelled to pray about it. If they were your friends, what would you say to them if they said they were praying about moving in together? I think the most loving response might be this: **"You don't have to pray about disobeying God!"** The Bible presents the clear teaching that the sexual relationship was designed by God for those who are married, and that sexual relationships outside of marriage are sin (often referred to as *fornication*). Let me say to all of you: **You don't have to pray about disobeying God!** Just say no!

Perhaps now you may be more open to my initial statement: **There are times when we do not need to pray.** If you need any more convincing, try reading Malachi, especially Chapter 1.

As you might suspect, today's lesson from God's Word is one such occasion, a time when God called a halt to praying. Our text is in the seventh chapter of Joshua, but I need to catch you up on where we are in the story.

Moses is dead. The great leader who had led God's people out of Egyptian bondage got to see the land of promise, but God would not allow him to enter that land. This was God's judgment on Moses for allowing anger and arrogance to cause him to treat God's word with contempt and to rob God of His glory. Now Moses' protégé, Joshua, carries the mantle of leadership. It is clear he also leads with God's blessing. He and the children of Israel have crossed the Jordan River on dry land (echoes of the Red Sea crossing). The spies have penetrated inside the walls of Jericho and returned safely. God has given Joshua some very strange military strategy:

3 You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. 4 And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall

shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him." (Joshua 6:3-5 NKJV)

You have to wonder what Joshua thought, don't you? Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, right on through Day 6. Surely he thought, "This is an odd way to win a war!" But Joshua obeyed God! And, on the seventh day, after seven trips around the city, the people shouted with a great shout when the priests blew the trumpets, and the walls came a tumblin' down (dooby down, dooby down, doo-wah)! What a day of celebration! God had given clear orders concerning the city and how everything was to be destroyed or placed in the Temple treasury.

A nearby town was the next target for Israel. The town was called Ai. It was a smaller town than Jericho, and Joshua's spies assured him that it would be a piece of cake! "Don't send up the whole army," they reported. "This will be a cake-walk! So, with more than a little pride and with two-to-three thousand soldiers, the battle with Ai began - and ended soon after! The Israelites were roundly and soundly defeated, and left 36 fighting men dead on the ground. They were demoralized, and their hearts melted!

This was a huge defeat at an incredibly bad time! If Israel's enemies, whose hearts had melted because of the reports of the prowess of the people of God (and thus their God), heard of this defeat, their courage would escalate quickly. All eyes were on Joshua and the other leaders. What would they do?

Let's pick up the story in your bibles, starting in Joshua 7 with verse 6:

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. 7 And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all — to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

10 So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? 11 Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things,

and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. 13 Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you." (Joshua 7:6-14 NKJV).

Joshua's response sure looks proper, doesn't it? He got serious about praying, and almost started whining! The clothes ripped and the dust flew! But in verse 10, God speaks. Did you hear what he said? Eugene Peterson paraphrases it like this: *Get up! Why are you groveling?* In my loose paraphrase it sounds like this: "Stop praying! Prayer is not the proper response at this moment!" (**There are times when we do not need to pray!**) God knew there was sin in the camp! Achan had disobeyed the command of God. He had taken a beautiful Babylonian garment, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels (7:21), and then he hid them in a hole in the floor of his tent. His hidden rebellion had caused the defeat of God's people! Their efforts to raze hell were futile (see 7:12) while his rebellion was hidden!

The rest of the story is not pretty. Achan and all his family were stoned in the Valley of Achor (Trouble). Everything he had, he lost!

What lesson was learned that day? Was it not that when sin is in the camp, it is not time to pray, it is time to radically remove the hidden rebellion? God told Joshua: *Get up! Sanctify the people! I will not be with you any more as long as you tolerate this rebellious man! Clean house!* (My paraphrase.)

Well, it is time for the Sermon in a sentence: **Hidden rebellion will always sabotage hell-razing!** We can talk a good battle, we can read our bibles and pray, we can engage our culture concerning the things that matter to God, but it will all come to nothing if there is a lack of purity in the people of God! **Hidden rebellion will always sabotage hell-razing!**

How about it, friend? Are you an Achan? Are you rebelling against God? Have you buried something under the rug in your home? Is it time to clean house? You say, "Preacher, I am not hurting anybody! This is a private

matter between me and God!" I declare to you this day: If you are part of this body of believers, your hidden rebellion can bring us defeat. Your hidden rebellion will sabotage our efforts to destroy the works of the devil. You cannot kick Satan while bowing down to him! It is time to clean house. Put away the pornography! Say goodbye to your greed! Stop dallying with that Delilah in your workplace! Be done with bitterness! Be radical in your repentance!

Then – pray! Seek purity and find God’s forgiveness – and then pray!
Remove that which offends God from your life, and then raze hell!

In his book *Why Prayers are Unanswered*, John Lavender retells a story about Norman Vincent Peale:

When Peale was a boy, he found a big, black cigar, slipped into an alley, and lit up. It didn't taste good, but it made him feel very grown up ... until he saw his father coming. Quickly he put the cigar behind his back and tried to be casual.

Desperate to divert his father's attention, Norman pointed to a billboard advertising the circus.

"Can I go, Dad? Please, let's go when it comes to town."

His father's reply taught Norman a lesson he never forgot.

"Son," he answered quietly but firmly, "never make a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience."

Hidden rebellion will always sabotage hell-razing! There are times when we don't need to pray – we need to clean our house and clean our life! Will you do so today? For your sake, for the sake of your family and the family of God, for God's sake – clean house!