

November 6, 2011 - Gluttony vs. Persecution

This is the last week of our Battlefield series. So as we have done most of the weeks that we've gone through the series we want to go through a little bit of a review. We'll do this very quickly, see how many of the blanks you can fill in with me. Remember, if you are reading in the book, the assignment this week is Chapter 8, The Story that God Loves. That will conclude the book so that will finish this off. That's your assignment for this week.

Okay, here we go. There is a ____ (battle) going on. You are at the ____ (centre, the middle, the heart of the battle). You cannot ____ (avoid, escape, get out of) the battle. Your heart and mind are where the battle is ____ (being fought). And your heart and mind are what the battle is ____ (being fought for, or over). And both sides are lobbying for your allegiance the message on our side is, life is good and it's full and it's abundant and it's satisfying and it's as good as it gets and it's the way it was meant to be. If you go to the other side you will be missing out.

Now, having almost completed the series, I'd like to give you a chance to reflect on some of the things we've covered.

On this side, we have all of our black banners and so I want you to take a moment and reflect on some of the things we have discussed. Which of the "Black banner" do you find most challenging in your life? You can rate them one to seven or you can reflect on the one's that are most challenging for you. Take a second and do that if you would.

On the other side, we have the "White Banner" items. I'd like you to do the same thing. Which of these banners do you find the most encouraging the most helpful, as we've read through the Beatitudes, as we've done this series. Kind of sort through those and see which one's have given you some comfort or some encouragement as we've talked through them these last several weeks.

Now, if you would. We've done each of these in pairs as we've gone through and I'm going to flash up the pairs on the screen for you that we have gone through. I want you to ask yourself, as we've gone through we've been talking about this in terms and in the context of a battle and some of the battle lines that have been drawn in this struggle. So, as we go through, just ask yourself on this particular battle line, who is winning in your life.

Poor in spirit vs. Pride.

Mourning vs. Envy.

Hunger for what is right vs. Sloth.

Mercy Giver vs. Greed

Pure in Heart vs. Lust.

Meek Peacemaker vs. Wrath

The Persecuted vs. Gluttony.

Now, this morning, we're going to start the discussion about Gluttony. As I was preparing this week, I thought "How would be a good way for us to begin?" And I thought "You know what I should do, I should get one of those big round tables that we have and stick it out on the Foyer and cover it with donuts." I would pile it high with donuts and I would put a sign up. I was going to try and have one that rotated and on one side it would say "Please Help Yourself" and on the other side it would say "Today our Lesson is about Gluttony". And I thought I would just stand out in the foyer and watch people as they came in and see what would happen. But, I decided not to do that for a couple of reasons. One, because I didn't know if I could resist the temptation of a whole table full of donuts. And the other reason and the more important reason is, it kind of perpetuates a false idea about gluttony. And that is that gluttony is exclusively about over-eating. I want to struggle for us to get away from that concept this morning a little bit because gluttony is not exclusively about overeating. Overeating is probably the most blatantly obvious example we could have of gluttony although, he mentions and specifies in the book that there are some people who are overweight who are not gluttonous and there are some people who are super, super, skinny, who are gluttonous. But it seems like the eating thing is the easiest one for us to identify.

How many of you have seen this show on T.V. It's called "Man vs. Food". I watch this sometimes and my wife comes in and chastises me for it. This is a show on the Travel Channel, of all things. This guy's name is Adam. He goes to all these different restaurants and tries out all these different kinds of foods and at the end of each episode there is a challenge of some kind. And so there is usually a time limit involved. Sometimes he has to eat a giant hamburger in one hour. Or a giant pizza; or a giant burrito; or a giant ice cream sundae; or a giant piece of steak; or some really, really, super insanely hot wings. So each show he has this. It's kind of like a train wreck when you're watching this. The guy is there and he's eating and he's sweating and there's tears pouring out of his eyes and he's in agony and he's kind of forcing each bite into his mouth trying to complete this challenge. In some ways, that is a great picture for what gluttony is all about.

But, when we talk about gluttony these days and it's not a word we use very often, the most common use of the word gluttony has nothing to do with food for the most part. The most common use of the phrase is "Glutton for Punishment." I don't know what you might apply that phrase to. I was thinking this morning, as I woke up and saw the snow, that some of my friends back in B.C., when they knew I was moving back to Saskatchewan, may have suggested that on days like this I am a glutton for punishment for making that decision to come back to all the snow and the cold. Richard is getting himself psyched up to do another all-nighter with the teens, some might suggest that is a glutton for punishment, I don't know. But, in my opinion, anyone who signs up for a committee is a glutton for punishment. Probably the best example I've seen for a glutton for punishment comes from another show. I've only seen one episode of this show on the Discovery channel. It's called "Guinea Pig". This guy he tests out all of these different things. He tests out how long you can go without water and still survive. He tests out, how long you can withstand freezing cold and still survive. The one episode I did see

of this show, he was testing out all of the non-lethal weapons that the police use. He stood there and let himself be Tasered. He stood there and let himself be shot with the bean bag gun. He stood there and let himself be shot with the rubber bullets, just to test all these things out. To me, this man is a glutton for punishment.

Really, when we talk about gluttony. Gluttony is not exclusively about over eating. Gluttony is about over anything. It's about knowingly indulging more than is needed. We were at the theatre yesterday. We were watching Puss and Boots but I saw the poster for this movie. I'm not endorsing this movie, I just saw it and I couldn't help but make the connection to our lesson this morning. The sub-title for this movie is "Absolutely Nothing in Moderation". And that, is gluttony's theme song, absolutely nothing in moderation. Now, as we look at what gluttony is and try to define and describe it a little bit, you may start to feel that this sounds an awful lot like some of the other things we've already covered so far. Part of that is just inevitable. We're at the end of our series and series are usually built on things that are grouped together and things are grouped together because they are similar. As we go through it get's hard to talk about things that are similar every week, without some of it sounding the same. Just for a little bit of clarification, I'm going to pick some of these things that we've already covered that are going to sound a little bit similar to what we're going to say about gluttony and try to nuance them a little bit and distinguish them a little bit just for clarity's sake.

First of all "Sloth". We've talked about sloth and sloth says "I'd be happy if I'd immerse myself in less important things and ignore the more important things. The reason that makes you happy is because less important things are usually easier to succeed in and if you don't succeed in a less important thing well, it's not a big deal and so, therefore that makes you happy and it's easier to live with.

Secondly, Envy. Envy says "If I could just get what you have, your looks; your talents; your bank account; your house; your family, etc." If I could just get what you have then I would be happy. Greed, which is very similar, says "I'd be happy if I could just get a little bit more. Regardless of what I have, all I need is just a little bit more then I would be happy and when I get that little bit more then all I need is just a little bit more than that." But what gluttony says, it's very similar to those, but different, it says "I'll be happy when I fully indulge in _____" and the blank is your vice of choice, your vice of preference. Now, my vice of preference and your vice of preference may be different. My vice of preference may be different from time-to-time depending on how I'm feeling. The interesting reality is that my vice of preference might actually be a good thing in moderation. The deadly sins often take something that is good and distort it into something damaging. So, whatever your vice of choice is, good or bad, whatever your vice of choice is, greed says "More of it is better." Gluttony says "All of it is best." And that's the message it tries to sell you.

Gluttony is capsulated in the suffix "aholic". Anything you put the suffix "aholic" on the end, that is what greed is trying to say. So, the one that first comes to mind with gluttony is 'a foodaholic' perhaps. Or maybe you're not a foodaholic specifically, but maybe you're a

restaurant-aholic. One of those people who indulges in going out and being pampered in the restaurant instead of having to cook and clean the dishes at home. Maybe some of us are 'popaholics' or maybe you're a 'javaholic'. Some of us, at this time of year especially, become 'chocoholics' as you try and sneak the candy from your kids or polish off whatever the trick or treaters did not claim at your house. So all of those things are our vices that we might be tempted to add the 'holic' suffixes to. There's the common ones that are more well known, things like alcoholic or drugaholic or gambling-aholic, or sexaholic, or perhaps even an attention-aholic. We all know those people who always need to be the centre of attention and where everything one way or another, everything always ends up being about them. That is their gluttony, that is their indulgence. More and more commonly, we have people who are becoming tech-aholics, who are so obsessed with technology and getting the newest gadget and the newest update and the newest app we indulge ourselves in that. I saw a video this week of this girl, her name is Amanda Foot and she is a college student. Amanda Foot's claim to fame is that she spent 41 hours standing in line in New York to get the first Ipad 2. But she stood in line for 41 hours in the rain, to get the first Ipad 2, not for herself, but she was selling her spot at the front of the line to someone else. A man names Hazeem Syeed, paid her \$900.00 for her spot at the front of the line just so he could be the first person to get the first Ipad 2. The reason he wanted the first Ipad 2 is that he was a business person and he was leaving on a flight that day and he was going over to Europe and he wanted to impress all of his European colleagues that he had the new Ipad 2. Sometimes we indulge ourselves in technology and that becomes our gluttony. Or perhaps maybe you're a D.S. aholic. Anyone, becoming a Facebook aholic, perhaps, or a Farmbill aholic. Maybe you're a T.V. aholic or a movie aholic or an Oprah aholic. Maybe some of us tend to get suckered into becoming sports aholic, or sleep aholics, or workaholics or shopaholics or shoeaholics, or maybe just in general stuff aholics.

Read some stats this week, the first self-storage units showed up on Texas back in the 1960's. Today, 10% of households have items in a self-storage unit. There are 40,000 self-storage units in the U.S. which amounts to more than 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage. That is the land area equivalent of Manhattan Island, three times. That's how much stuff we have accumulated. The average new home in the U.S. has grown almost 50% in the last three years. The average family size has declined over that same period and yet, we are accumulating more and more stuff. Perhaps some of us have become a stuff-aholic. Almost anything can become an 'aholic' and an aholic is gluttony. Gluttony says 'happiness comes from fully indulging your vice of preference.' As we consider that for a minute, on one level that starts to seem almost logical. After all, if one piece of pie tastes good, two pieces of pie will taste twice as good. If a 36" screen looks good, a 52" screen will look great. If spending \$20.00 on a little retail therapy at the Mall makes you feel a little bit better, then spending \$100 bucks will make you feel a lot better. If staying up playing video games a little late one night is fun for you, then maybe staying up all night playing video games will make you feel even better and be more enjoyable for you. If there are a couple shoes in your closet and that is good, then perhaps a closet full of shoes will be fantastic.

Need a volunteer. Two qualifications, you have to like donuts and you didn't have a big breakfast. Robert. I didn't think that was going to be a challenge. Okay. Stand right there,

a little illustration here. I want you to give me your feelings about this experiment. In this bag there are three Timbits. If I gave you three Timbits and said ‘these are yours, the only catch is, you have to eat all of them. How would you feel?’ Pretty good. In this box are 10 Timbits. If I gave you this box of Timbits and said ‘there are 10 Timbits in here. They are yours to enjoy. The only catch is, you have to eat all of them right now.’ How would you feel? ‘Not really my style but I’ll go with good.’ Okay. ‘In this box there are 20 Timbits. I will give these Timbits to you and say they are yours to enjoy. The only catch is, you have to eat all of them right now. How are you feeling?’ ‘Um. We’ll let you give it a shot.’ Hang on. ‘In this box there 40 Timbits. If I gave this box to you and said, these are yours to enjoy, the only catch is, you have to eat them all. How would you feel?’ ‘No thanks’. I didn’t even get to my last one. My last one was ‘we have 73 Timbits here....if I gave all of those to you, how would you feel?’ ‘Really, no thanks.’ Okay. Thank you Robert.

The whole point of that little demonstration was to verify something that we already know, that it is possible to have too much of even a good thing. Eventually, even good isn’t good anymore. There are very few things in life that don’t turn bad when you get too much of them. Not to mention that extreme indulgence in one thing almost always leads to neglect of other things. Extreme indulgence in food leaves to neglect of your health. Extreme indulgence of spending leads to neglect of financial responsibility and stability. Extreme indulgence of entertainment leads to neglect of family and work and health and all sorts of other things. Extreme indulgence of gluttony attempts to convince us that, if we get enough of this thing, we won’t need any other things, other people, or even God himself.

There’s a curious story in the Book of Numbers, Chapter 11:31-34. See if this doesn’t seem odd to you in some ways:

“The Lord sent a wind that brought quail from the sea and let them fall around the camp. For miles from every direction” some versions say “for as far as man could walk” “there were quail, flying about three feet above the ground.” Some versions say: “Piled three feet above the ground.” “So the people went out and caught quail all that day, throughout the night and all the next day too. No one gathered less than 50 bushels. They spread the quail all around the camp to dry. While they were still gorging themselves on the meat and while it was still in the mouth, the anger of the Lord blazed against the people. He struck them with a severe plague. So that place was called Kilbroth Havata, which means, graves of gluttony, because there they buried the people who craved the meat from Egypt.”

Now, it’s an odd story because the people are complaining about not having food and so God sends them food. That’s what makes the story odd because God eventually gets upset with the people, but God is the one who sent the quail in the first place. God had sent quail to feed them before. So at first I was a little confused as to why God would be upset with these people eating the quail that He sent to them. But then, I did the math. Here’s what the text says: “The people went out and caught the quail all that day, throughout the night, all the next day, too. They gathered no less than 50 bushels.” I did some research and found out that 50

bushels is between 4 and 500 gallons. It's about 2,000 litres. Now, no one needs 500 gallons of quail to eat. There is no way that anyone, it would be like the 73 Timbits, except far worse. Five hundreds gallons of quail per person is what they gathered and those who trusted God to provide would have just gathered what they needed but people went out instead and gathered these insane amounts. That's what bothered God about their behaviour. You see, gluttony tries to persuade us that if we get enough quail, or whatever our vice is, then we will no longer have to depend on God, we can rely on ourselves.

I'm not sure why gluttony ended up as the last in our series. It's the last in our series because it's the last in Cook's book. I'm not sure why he did that. It fits in some ways. In some ways it makes sense. Here's what Cook says about gluttony:

“At it's most demonic, gluttony amplifies all the other sins, enhancing their self-destructive power.”

You see gluttony actually just feeds in to the other sins and all these other things can actually become the vice that we start to indulge. You see, the person who struggles with pride is a me-aholic. The person who struggles with envy, is a you-aholic. A person who struggles with sloth is a trivial-aholic. If you struggle with greed, you're likely a stuff-aholic. If you struggle with lust, you're a sex-aholic. If you struggle with wrath, you're a revenge-aholic. And in each of these cases, gluttony insists that, if we could just get enough of these things, then we would be happy. Then we wouldn't need anything or anyone, including God. But no matter how much you indulge, it's still never enough.

So if extreme indulgence is not going to bring the desired result, we must ask the question. How can we live a glutton-free life? Jesus' answer comes from the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5:11, He says:

“Blessed are the persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of Me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in Heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

But now, much like the other Beatitudes, this last one doesn't seem very appealing to us, at first glance. Jesus' description of happiness includes poor in spirit and mourning and hunger and thirsting and now, persecution. How can happiness belong to those who are insulted and lied about and treated poorly. Well, if gluttony is all about indulgence, that is, getting as much as you can, then a glutton-free life is all about the willingness to give up things when necessary. You see, persecution is not about being forced to endure horrible things, persecution is about giving up something based on the belief that there is something better down the road. It's about giving up your health or your safety or your respect or your possessions or your status or your family. All of these things get sacrificed because the person believes that there is something worth it coming down the line. Often persecution could be avoided if we would just

give up that future promise. If we would just give up our faith or our religious belief, we could avoid persecution. If we would just give up our rights we could avoid persecution. If we would just give up our lunch money, we could avoid persecution. But the persecuted are willing to endure the current hardship in light of their future hope. That's what Paul writes in 2Corinthians, Chapter 4:16-18:

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day-by-day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Now think back to the Timbits illustration. Which of these scenarios would you prefer. There are 73 Timbits, they are yours and you have to eat them all. There are 73 Timbits, they are yours, eat what you want and the rest just go to waste. There are 73 Timbits, you eat some, you give some away. Or even, there are 73 Timbits, you eat some but give most of them away. God says that the ideal way to happiness is to give things away for greater happiness down the road. The message from God's side of the battle is almost always the same. He says “I will offer you true, full, abundant life.” He says “I can help you experience true full and genuine happiness, but, you're going to have to trust me.”

The message from the other side of the battle also promises life and happiness, but it says “You're going to have to go out and get it on your own.”

Back in the Old Testament, Numbers, Chapter 13: 27-31, there's a story. The Israelites have left Egypt they've come to the promised land and they are just outside the borders of the promised land and so they send in 12 spies to examine the land. The spies go in and they look around and they see all these wondrous things of the land. It says, they chopped down one thing of grapes and it took two of them to carry it. It's just this glorious picture of a promised land. Everything you would expect it to be. Then they came back and reported to Moses. They gave Moses this account:

“We went into the land which you sent us and it does flow with milk and honey. Here is the fruit. The people who live there are powerful. The cities are fortified and very large. We saw descendents of Anak there. The Amelekites live in Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amotites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.

Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

But the men who came with him said “We can't attack these people; they are stronger than we are.”

As the spies reported back to Moses, ten of them said “Life in the promised land would be

awesome, it would be fantastic, it would be terrific, but we can't get there on our own." Caleb and Joshua stand up and say "If we trust in God, He will deliver what He has promised."

And in many ways, as we stand on the front line of these battles, we are left with the same two options that the Israelite spies had. We can look at life and assess it based on what we can accomplish on our own; or we can trust God to deliver what He has promised.

It's the choice that Jesus described in Matthew, Chapter 6. He said:

"Do not store up for yourself treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasure in Heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

It says "Don't store up treasure that can be destroyed or stolen." Pride will get shot down and fail. Envy will convince you that there's always someone who has got it a little bit better than you do. Sloth, will leave the important things undone. Greed will leave you always wanting more. Lust will leave you with a poor substitute for true love and joy. Wrath will seek vengeance and destroy relationships. Gluttony will leave you hollow and empty. Instead, store up treasures that last. Things like a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Comfort when you hurt. An inheritance that cannot be taken away. Being filled when you are running on empty. Mercy, when you fall short. Seeing God in your life and in the world. Becoming a child of God with all the privileges of an heir. A great reward beyond compare.

You stand on the front lines. The Battle is on. One side is easy and quick. The other side is good. One side says you've got to achieve it on your own. The other side says "Trust in God to deliver." One side offers goals that cannot be achieved. The other side offers promises that are GUARANTEED. One side disintegrates, the other side endures.

Which side will you choose?