Greed

Let us turn our attention to the Word of God, opening to the Epistle of James, chapter 1, and read together verses 12 to 15: *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* Amen.

We will pay particular attention to verses 14 and 15, which tell us that *"every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."* So this lust entices us; it draws us in. *"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* We will reflect on these words, thinking about the different situations in which we covet, about the object of our desire, and about the reasons why lust conceives and gives birth to sin. The word *conceived* refers to the process by which sin is conceived and born, and once sin is committed, it brings death.

We will go on in the Epistle of James, this time in chapter 4, to see whether we, too, struggle with lust, which can take many forms and show itself in many ways in our fleshly nature. We read from verse 1: *"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* Amen.

The fights and quarrels among us are another expression of the lusts that war in our members. There is good desire and there is evil desire, the latter being the lust of the flesh. It is important to turn to 1 John, chapter 2, as well, to understand this better.

The world is full of lusts, and people often live by them. In 1 John, chapter 2, verses 15, 16 and 17, we are told: *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."* Amen.

So the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh are fleeting, and they are set before us as warnings in the Word of God.

In Colossians, chapter 3, verses 5, 6 and 7, we find a clear command: *"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived

in them."* Amen.

We are told to *"mortify"* our members which are upon the earth, including evil desire and the lust of the eyes, which are expressions of our fleshly nature.

In Titus, chapter 2, verses 11 and 12, we read: *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"*. Amen.

In Romans, chapter 13, verses 12 to 14, we find this command carried further: *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."* The works of darkness include worldly lusts.

"*Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."*

The Word of God, in the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 7, goes on urging us to reflect on covetousness. We read from chapter 7, verse 7: *"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."*

In the Epistle of James we read that *lust draws us away and entices us, then conceives sin, which, once it is finished, brings death in its train*. So it is through the Law that we come to know sin.

Let us go back to the Old Testament, where the Law was given and where man learned about covetousness. We define covetousness by the Law, as we think about it.

Let us turn to Deuteronomy chapter 5, where the Law says: *"Thou shalt not covet."* We are shown what we must not desire, namely the things that do not belong to us. We read verses 19 and 21, which belong together: *"Neither shalt thou steal… Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's."* Amen.

Can we say we must not covet anything that belongs to our neighbour? The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes are not of the Father, but of the world. Whoever loves the world is at enmity with God. God commands us not to covet and not to steal. And yet the Law itself can stir up covetousness in a person.

That is why it is essential to live by the promptings of the Spirit, not of the flesh. The Law can lead to sin, and sin brings death, as we read in *Romans 7*.

In Joshua we read about a sin committed because of the Law. In chapter 6, verse 16, we read the Lord's command: *"And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city. And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD."* Amen.

God's command, given through Joshua, was to be obeyed by Israel. Yet in chapter 7, verse 1, we read: *"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel."* Amen.

In Colossians we are reminded that the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. When the children of Israel sinned, God's wrath came upon the people, and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six Israelites, so that the people were stunned and their hearts melted, as verse 5 says.

In chapter 7, verses 19, 20 and 21, we go on reading about this event. Joshua spoke these words to Achan: *"My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."* Amen.

God had given clear commands about the silver, the gold and the other things, which were to be devoted to destruction. If Achan took those things without a command from the Lord, he committed sin. In other circumstances God allowed the people to take plunder, including women, children, menservants, maidservants and the riches they captured, as well as the livestock. But in this situation it was God's command itself that set Achan coveting what was not allowed to him.

Achan's lust conceived sin, as he was drawn by what he wanted and what was forbidden. In his heart there was a desire to have, even though he was not allowed to. The things Achan took, the silver and the gold, can be compared today to other forms of wealth, such as money or other goods. The tenth commandment of the Law says: *"Thou shalt not covet ... any thing that is thy neighbour's"*. But who is our neighbour? Let us think of those who provide us with free services, such as free hospital stays and free medical care. Do we, too, find ourselves in situations where we might covet what belongs to our neighbour?

We need to ask ourselves: when we make a contract, a deal between two people, are only two people involved, or is there a third? When we sell, buy, build or do renovation work, there is a

third party involved besides the two. Let us think about whether we covet the share that may belong to this third party.

People often covet what does not belong to them. God's command urges us to *mortify the members* within us, including the desire to have what we are not allowed to have. Otherwise we may bring God's wrath upon ourselves. From verse 11 of Joshua 7 we read: *"Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff."* Amen.

When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin, and sin, once finished, brings death. Achan was drawn by that gold, by the silver of Jericho. That garment he calls goodly was probably truly beautiful and desirable. But after he coveted, Scripture says, he took of the accursed thing; he stole it. It doesn't look like theft, does it? But doesn't it look as if he took it from someone? The garment was meant to be destroyed, but the silver and gold — did he not steal those? You could say he stole them from a third party. God was not visibly there, nor were His representatives who were supposed to collect the gold and silver, and in their absence he hid them.

If the representatives of the authorities are not present when we carry out dishonest transactions… You may have heard, as I did recently, that the government is pushing to bring in a law for next year to fight tax evasion. This law concerns cash transactions and proposes a cap of 5,000 lei — about a thousand euros — on cash payments, with everything above that going through the banks.

We are not discussing now whether this brings the Lord's coming nearer, but tax evasion. Why are they proposing this law? Because people covet what does not belong to them, they steal, and then they live a lie, claiming they did not steal. Recently I wanted to make a purchase, and the seller suggested we declare only half of the real amount and leave the rest off the paperwork. Because I didn't agree, he refused to sell me the product.

He wasn't angry with me, but he wouldn't go through with the sale because he didn't want to lose out. The VAT was the problem, because it was owed to the state and had to be included in the price of the product his company was selling. He wanted half of the price to go through without VAT, which would have meant a partly off-the-books sale. By accepting this offer I would have become an accomplice to the tax evasion he started and, at the same time, a beneficiary of the theft, since I would have got the product at a lower price.

That situation made me like Achan in the Bible. God gave clear commands to the people through Joshua, saying: *"Do not touch what is Mine. Do not touch it. The gold and the silver are Mine. You must bring them into the treasury of the Lord."* This means we must respect the laws in force, including tax laws, and contribute to the common treasury of the country, whatever the rate or kind of tax.

God urges us to reflect on covetousness and to understand how it affects us. Today there are many "Achans" among religious people who claim to live among the people of God without being

called to account for what they do. God warned that those who do not keep the laws would be destroyed, and the question arises whether today we are being spiritually destroyed for not keeping these commands.

Romans 13 speaks about submission to the authorities: *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God."* The existing authorities were established by God. It is important to remember that this epistle was written to the Romans, a people with a well-defined system of government who ruled over other peoples, including the Jews. Caesar was the ruler, and the Lord Jesus, before Paul, was put on the spot with the question: *"Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar?"* To which He answered: *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's"*. So what must we do? Pay the tribute! Later the Apostle Paul says: *"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."*

Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. But what is the evil work and what is the good work? Evil desire. Evil desire is theft. We are drawn by our desire, by the wish to earn, because we need to live. We have to eat, clothe ourselves, pay the gas, electricity and water bills, cover many other costs, keep our children in school and so on, and the money is often not enough.

Any extra money earned is precious. Even 10 lei — a couple of euros — matters. Today I was at the bank, and behind me was a lady who had found that a 10-lei fee had been taken from her salary, and she had come to ask why. She thought it worth going to the bank, waiting in line, and looking into that deduction. If 10 lei matters, how important is it to earn that money, whether 10, 25 or 15 lei? Someone told me not long ago that he never went home a day without 25 lei above his wages on which he paid no tax. Back then that was a considerable sum. What is right is that we must earn money honestly, without dodging our taxes.

Do you want to have no fear of the authorities? Then do what is good, and you will have praise from them. What does it mean to do good? Not to steal, to pay your taxes. *"For he is the minister of God to thee for good."* What a beautiful truth is expressed here. He is the minister of God for our good. Let us think: have they done us good? Have they built us roads? We all remember the muddy roads of the past, don't we? How are things now? No more puddles, no more flooding.

"For he is the minister of God to thee for good." But if you do evil, if you steal, if you covet, then be afraid. *"For he beareth not the sword in vain."* He is God's minister, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. *"Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."*

This is also why we must pay taxes. Why? To be subject, for the authorities are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing — watching over the fulfilment of tax obligations. They are always watchful and never forget to deal with these matters, so that, for example, on the 25th of every month we pay all the taxes owed on our wages.

For example, if an employer does not pay the state the taxes on his employees' wages, as stated in the employment contract, because he lacks the funds, the state treats this as a criminal offence. Do you know what a criminal offence is? A minor offence is punished with a fine, but a criminal offence is punished with prison. They are two different things. Prison means loss of liberty.

If we do not pay the taxes on wages, that is a criminal offence, which shows how serious the matter is. Some may leave things out of the contract to avoid paying, thinking that if it isn't written down there is no obligation to pay, and so it isn't an offence. But who knows about these undeclared amounts? In the end, only God knows the sin. God knows about us, just as He knew about Achan.

"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." Amen.

We must not think of taxes as a levy, something extra taken from us, because that is not true. Taxes are sums of money redistributed to the people, not meant to make a particular person rich overnight. They are managed by civil servants, who are employees of the state and whose job is to keep the records. They work in our service and look after the common good, and so they are God's ministers for our good, as is said of the role of rulers.

It is important to know that the pension contributions collected from employees through the social insurance system are not always enough to cover retirees' pensions. In such cases the state has to find extra resources. For example, to cope with a 10–15% rise in pensions from January 1st, given inflation, the state will have to borrow in order to fund these increases.

Pensions are a great help to those who reach retirement age, and the state is responsible for providing that income. Even if we are sometimes unhappy with how officials do their job, we must acknowledge that they are *God's ministers for our good*, as it is written in the Word of God. What is more, rulers are charged with punishing those who do evil, such as those who commit tax evasion.

According to biblical teaching, it is our duty to meet our tax obligations. Romans 13:8 tells us: *"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."* In essence, all the commandments, including *"Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet"*, are summed up in the fundamental principle of love for one's neighbour: *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."*

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, which underlines how much our actions matter, and love is the fulfilling of the law. Amen. If a child is in financial need — say, wants to buy a house — will the parent who loves him support him, or do him harm? Obviously, he will chip in and help.

You may have heard recently about solar panels and how the state is offering financial support of 20,000 lei for installing them. That is about 4,000 euros. The state offers this money to encourage the use of solar panels, which produce electricity and can generate income. It is a form of free financial help.

Normally we don't see anyone handing out money like that, yet here the state does it. And not only for solar panels, but also through farm subsidies and other benefits. Again, love worketh no ill to his neighbour. It seems the state shows a kind of love, perhaps even greater than many people do. The legislation is well put together, with rules laid down so that we do not covet what belongs to another.

Property tax, for example, seems to take money from us, but in fact that money comes back to us in various forms, for our good. Some people think the state doesn't love us, that it harms us, that it doesn't give us enough. But this perception comes from a wrong desire, from wanting more than we are given — a desire that is never satisfied because it is driven by evil thoughts.

Let us return to Scripture and reflect on how serious the lust of the flesh is before God, and how much it matters for us. Let us be aware of these things. How far does covetousness reach? Some may covet millions of dollars or euros, having the ability and the opportunity to get them, even by dishonest means. Others may covet smaller sums — 50 lei, or 50 cents.

We must refrain from coveting what does not belong to us. It is important to owe no one anything. There are many temptations in the world, such as wanting to take a bag for our fruit in the shop without paying for it. Perhaps we are sometimes tempted to do that, but we must remember that God is testing us. The self-checkout asks us, *"With a bag or without?"* and we must choose rightly, even if the bag costs only a few cents. Some might be tempted not to pay, thinking no one will check and nothing will happen over such a small amount. But even coveting a small sum of money is a sin. Sin is not determined by the value of the thing desired, but by the very act of coveting.

Let us recall the words of Micah 2:1: *"Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand."* They covet fields and take them, they want houses and seize them, they oppress a man and his house, a man and his heritage. The Lord warns that He will bring evil upon such people.

We must examine our own actions and thoughts. Even if we have not committed great acts of wickedness, we must recognise that small deeds are wrong too. It is easy to turn a blind eye when things don't belong to us or when it isn't clear who the owner is. But if we covet something that isn't ours and act on that desire, we are in sin.

Instead of *fields*, we can think of other things people covet and take without right, such as taxes or other people's property. These actions are wrong and will bring God's punishment, as is also mentioned in Habakkuk. God will bring evil upon those who do such things.

The righteousness of God is far from those who consider themselves believers and righteous, who think they have God's righteousness through the Lord Jesus, and who nevertheless do these things. Their wicked behaviour, in which they mix evil into their own lives, is plain to see.

They are led by their own lusts, as described in Habakkuk chapter 2, verses 9 to 11: *"Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many

people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it."* The wall and the timber are witnesses to these deeds. Whatever the size of the gain, whether a wheelbarrow of sand or more, wicked deeds are just as blameworthy. Many people get greedy over a wheelbarrow of sand from the roadside to take into their yard, without asking whether this is an ill-gotten gain.

Comparing the price of sand at a DIY store, where a bucket cost one leu, and if a wheelbarrow holds ten buckets, our theft comes to 10 lei. Maybe we notice garden soil piled up by a road; let us ask ourselves whether taking a wheelbarrow of it would be wrong, even though it was out in a field and nobody knows.

In God's eyes, coveting and taking what is not yours are sins, according to the commandment *"Thou shalt not covet any thing that is thy neighbour's"*. This is driven home by the verse about ill-gotten gain, which shows how serious these deeds are before God.

You build your nest, you have your house, everything seems fine, but we need to see whether the things we have were obtained through wrongdoing. Cash-in-hand work, materials also bought through dishonest channels, passed from one person to another, cheaper and so on.

"The stone in the middle of the wall, which you came by dishonestly, cries out. And the beam out of the timber answers it." What do you think that stone in the middle of the wall might cry out? God sees. Man would like to behave as lord of the earth and justify his actions by saying he earns too little. Is that true? Of course, we earn little. And if we want to be honest, to be fair workers towards others, we will certainly find ourselves in a harder position.

And then Satan comes to stir us up, to tempt us, to make us covet. And it almost seems better if we manage to steal. When we cheated at school, we coveted. Let us think carefully. We coveted something that wasn't ours.

I remember from my childhood. I was small and felt sad and upset. I sat in the front row and couldn't cheat. The others, at the back, at the end of the history lesson, after the test, would boast: *"I cheated, I opened the book and copied from it."* And I had to study. I was in the front row, and the teacher sat at his desk watching me, and I watched him. There was no way out. And I was sorry to be in the front row.

I wanted so badly to sit further back, at least in the second row, so I could try to steal too. Why? I was drawn by lust. Getting something illicitly seemed more exciting. As Scripture says: *"Stolen waters are sweet."* They are sweeter. You enjoy wrongdoing, enjoy what isn't yours. The one who steals is glad. He doesn't realise he is harming another person.

When someone steals something from my yard, he causes me a loss. He doesn't even think about it. He is glad that now he has that thing. He has got something. God watches closely how we relate to earthly goods and warns us: *"Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."* When lusts are awakened, they can become hard to control. It is important to remember that coveting what does not belong to us is sin in God's eyes. We must be aware that covetousness can appear in many areas of life.

Reflecting on my own experience, I remember that in the past, when I ran a company and had enough income, I was tempted to get a computer program without paying for it.

There was a free version, which worked less well than the licensed version, which cost, say, 700 lei a year. Although that sum was no financial problem for my company, the desire to get something without contributing anything is an example of greed and covetousness.

To close, let us go back to a passage in Genesis to see an example of a character that is the opposite of greed. In chapter 14 we read about Abram and how he responded to an offer from the king of Sodom. After he had rescued the people of Sodom, including Lot, the king of Sodom said to Abram: *"Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself."* But Abram answered: *"I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: Save only..."* Nothing for me. Amen.

This passage shows us that Abram was not greedy and chose not to accept the goods offered, so as not to give the king occasion to say he had made him rich. This example urges us to reflect on our own character and on how we relate to material goods. What a lovely offer it would be for us if someone gave us something for free. What if I had done something for someone, had worked, and that person said to me, *"Here, this is a gift for you."* What did Abram do? He did not accept.

It would seem to us that it was his due. Abram had worked there. He could have lost his life, because he went to war. Perhaps some of his men died, since we know lives are lost in war. That's what tends to happen when you win a battle.

And yet Abram did not want so much as a thread. He wanted not even a thread, because it was an occasion for sin, so that the king of Sodom could not say afterwards, *"Aha, I made you rich — look, because I gave you what was mine."* Because those things belonged to the king of Sodom. That was Abram's heart.

We will read again from Genesis, again about Abraham. This time he is in the situation where Sarah, his wife, has died, and he has to bury her and has no burial place. Reading from chapter 23, let us see how far the man of God is from greed, from covetousness, from coveting.

We can read that Abraham desired the cave of Machpelah. He wanted it, but not for free. If he had taken it for free, that would have been evil desire. If he paid for it, he bought something and paid its price. And that is not evil desire. Evil desire is coveting what is not yours. Owe no man any thing, as the Word of God says.

We read from verse 3: *"And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."* And the children of Heth answered Abraham: *"Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us."*

"In the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead." Amen. *"Thou art a mighty prince among us."* You are an extraordinary man. You are a very important person to us. *"So bury your dead wherever you like."* Use it for free. That was the offer.

Many fall into this trap. Many people, when they apply for funding for solar panels — it means going and asking for help. In this case Abraham asked for nothing free; he wanted to buy, even though it was offered to him at no cost. Yet a person goes to ask to be given something for free — why would you insist on paying? The goal is to get funding, whether from the European Union or elsewhere, no matter the source. What is the difference between Abraham and people today?

In verse 7, Abraham did this: *"And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me, and intreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar, That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you."*

Ephron, who dwelt among the children of Heth, answered Abraham in the hearing of all: *"Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead."*

So Ephron offered it to him for free, like many offers on the internet that promise things at no cost. There are many programs with free versions and paid versions. Although the free version may be more limited, it still does the job. How convenient to use the free version! Abraham, too, could have accepted the free offer. Wouldn't that have been fine? He had been made an offer: *"In the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee."*

Yet Abraham felt he had a debt: Abraham bowed down and said to Ephron: *"But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there."* Ephron answered: *"My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead."* What are 10 lei? What are 20 lei? What are 50 lei? Now, I don't know what 400 shekels were worth in Abraham's day, so I can't tell you whether it was a small or large sum. Still, 400 shekels sounds impressive. How much did Achan steal? Achan coveted and took 200 shekels of silver. If it were a trifling sum… you don't bend down for a penny dropped on the ground, because it's not worth the effort. But for fifty cents you might already think about bending down, and for a whole coin you'd certainly be tempted to pick it up.

"And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant." When he weighed it, that means it was a considerable sum, because you don't use scales for tiny amounts.

"And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city." Amen.

Abraham gives us a valuable lesson. Abraham, the father of the faithful, shows us the importance of character. We will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I will rejoice to sit at table with this man who had such a character. We, who ought to have the character of Christ, should strive all the more to have a character like his. We should not want things without effort.

If we want something for free, doesn't that mean we are coveting? Let us think about it. It is a natural, earthly desire to want to have. This desire can chain us. How tempting it would have been for Abraham to get a cave, a field or a tree without paying. How tempting solar panels are for people too. And free, to boot. And you can see that in this world, the more people have, the more they want. May God help you keep your eyes open, and may we recognise the character of Christ.

Let us look at the Lord Jesus. Did He ever covet anything? Can we find a single example where He coveted? No — and we must not covet anything that is not ours. Amen.
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