

A Study of the Book of Joshua

Sermon # 6

“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SECRET SIN”

Joshua 7:1-26

The seventh chapter of Joshua opens with the ominous word “*but*.” The use of the little conjunction of contrast is designed to drive home the reality that victory is often followed by the threat of defeat. Suddenly we are presented with a series of failures that stand in striking contrast to the victories of the past six chapters. Israel had just experienced a miraculous victory over Jericho, “*but*” now they are going to experience defeat. The gladness of victory was soon replaced by the gloom of defeat, all this because of the disobedience of one man. This story has much to teach about the devastating effects of sin.

“But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel. (2) Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, “Go up and spy out the country.” So the men went up and spied out Ai. (3) And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.” (4) So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. (5) And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

Joshua sends out spies to Ai, who returned with the report that it would not be necessary to send the entire army to the battle at Ai, two or three thousand men should be sufficient. The crucial difference is that this time God was not with them. The troops of Israel quite literally had to run for their lives. Thirty-six men were lost in this battle. These may not seem significant losses in an army of 3,000 but the defeat described here is the only defeat recorded in Joshua and the only report of Jews slain in battle.

Several explanations are advanced by the commentators as the reasons for the defeat at Ai such as Self-Confidence, and a lack of prayer. Being a little over confident and resting too much on the victory at Jericho, Joshua perhaps failed to take the time to get alone with the Lord to seek His direction and His strength. At the very least Israel was guilty of overestimating her own power and underestimating the strength of the enemy. There is still too much of a tendency on the part of the people of God to rush off without taking time to draw near to the Lord.

When Joshua sent out the troops to take Ai he was unaware of Achan’s sin or of God’s displeasure. I have to wonder that if he had consulted with the Lord before making his plans if he would not have learned about both. Likewise many of our personal failures could be avoided if we first took our plans and concerns to God in prayer. Christians would do well to spend time consulting with God *before* making decisions that may have a major impact both their own lives and the lives of others.

But the reason that God gives for the defeat (v.11) is that there is *“sin in the camp.”*(vv. 10-12) One of the soldiers, a man named Achan, who was involved in the siege of Jericho, saw the riches of the city and decided to keep some of the things for himself, in spite of the instructions forbidding any of the Israelites from doing so.

Let consider the devastating effects of sin –

1. SIN AFFECTS OTHERS

No one’s sin is ever just his business alone it always affects others. No matter how secret a sin might be, its effects spill over into the lives of others. Disobedience to God is a contagious disease that has serious effects on the broader community of believers. My sin cannot be isolated from you and your sin cannot be isolated from me. Sin corrupts, and what is done in private has a public effect.

Because of the defeat it was immediately apparent that God was no longer behind them and they were confused, it created misgivings and a lack of confidence in the Lord. Rather than examine their own lives for the source of the defeat, they began to doubt the Lord and wonder if He had changed His mind or if they had misunderstood His directions.

Joshua prostrated himself before the Lord. After a whole day on his face (v. 6) Joshua in verse seven begins to verbalize the perplexity that he felt in his heart. Perhaps he was feeling that he had let the people down, that the people would be blaming him for the defeat, and concerned how this would impact his ability to lead the people.

Joshua’s compliant of verse seven is one of despair not unbelief. Complaining to God in prayer is not the same as complaining about God.

One thing that Joshua seems genuinely concerned about is the effect on the name of God (v. 9). If Canaanites are victorious over Israel what will that do to the great name of the Lord.

(vv. 11-12)

“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.”

In verse ten the KJV translates has *“get thee up,”* the NIV *“stand up,”* the NASB *“rise up,”* and the NKJV has *“get up.”* This command calls for Joshua to rise up for his state of despair which has incapacitated him, in order to prepare himself for action, listen to the Lord’s instructions, take his position of responsibility and take his position as leader of the people. He can’t lead the people with his face in the dirt or while moping about, depressed over the defeat.

God told Joshua (v. 11) that he was holding the whole nation accountable for Achan’s sin. God called this sin a violation of their covenant with Him, and specified that they were guilty of sacrilege,

theft, lying and deceitful hoarding. And because of these sins, the Israelites had been overrun by the soldiers of Ai (v. 12).

It is hard to imagine anything more frightening than hearing (v. 12b) *"I will be with you no more unless you destroy the accursed (thing) from among you."* Nothing is more crucial than the presence of God among His people. Nothing should distress His people more than the loss of God among them.

I wonder then if the apparent absence of God in various segments of church life may be due to our unwillingness to remove evil from our midst.

(v. 14)

"In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man."

In verse fourteen Joshua was given instructions as to how the judgment is to be carried out and promises to point out the man by selecting first his tribe, then his clan, then his family and finally the man himself. Presumably, this determination was to be made by the casting of lots, a common practice in Old Testament times for the determination of God's will when no other method was available.

But why did God not just reveal this man's identity to Joshua? The answer is in that this method would impress on the nation of Israel the seriousness of this sin and it would give the guilty person an opportunity to repent and confess. I believe that had Achan immediately confessed and truly repented of his sin, he and his whole household might have been spared!

Sin Not only Affect Others -

2. SIN WILL BE UNCOVERED (vv. 16-21)

In verses sixteen through eighteen the process of discovery is described beginning with all Israel until it was narrowed down by tribes to the tribe of Judah, then by families or clans to the Zerathites, then to the family of Zimri and from that family to Achan.

We should note that though Achan did confess his sin, he did so only when he was found out and forced to. It is quite probable that he would not have confessed had he not been discovered.

There is no such thing as "a secret sin." Trying to hide sin is such a foolish thing. Illustration - Band-aids on the Bathroom Mirror. *"The drunk husband snuck up the stairs quietly. He looked in the bathroom mirror and bandaged the bumps and bruises he'd received in a fight earlier that night. He then proceeded to climb into bed, smiling at the thought that he'd pulled one over on his wife. When morning came, he opened his eyes and there stood his wife. "You were drunk last night weren't you!" "No, honey." "Well, if you weren't, then who put all the band-aids on the bathroom mirror?"*

[www.bible.org/illus/s/s-110.htm]

Trying to hide sin from God is as foolish as bandaids on a mirror. Sin never escapes the watchful eye of God (Psalm 139). Numbers 32:23 reminds us, *“be sure your sin will find you out.”*

But please note that Achan’s guilt was not determined solely on the basis of falling of the ot, but upon Achan’s confession and the evidence that was found in his tent (vv. 22-23).

Sin Will Always Be Uncovered -

3. SIN HAS ITS ALLURE (vv. 20-21)

“And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: (21) When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.”

When Achan described the things that he took from Jericho he called them *“spoils,”* which may have been an attempt to rationalize what he had done. Wealth plundered from an enemy was usually considered a legitimate reward for participating in a battle. But the wealth of Jericho was not *“spoils”* or *“plunder.”* In the original instructions given Joshua concerning the capture of Jericho he stated very specifically that the entire city was *“under the ban”* (6:17-19). Everything in the city – except for Rahab and her family – must be destroyed and burned with fire. But while his comrades in arms were gathering up gold, silver and bronze to be dedicated to God, Achan was sneaking off with some loot to his tent where he buried it. The fact that Achan hid the plunder shows that he knew that what he was doing was wrong. * The loot he buried would be worth roughly \$25,000 today. [W. Philip Keller. *Joshua Mighty Warrior and Man of Faith. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992) p.103*]

The psychological process of sin that Achan described is as old as sin itself. The three crucial steps in Achan’s sin are given in verse twenty-one; he saw, he coveted, he took. Eve took the same tragic steps in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6) as did David in his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2-4).

The sin which began in his heart, soon spilled out. We may be tempted to sin in our minds and by the grace of God confess it and repudiate the sin before it happens. But if we do not that which was considered in secret become an open sin.

Three laws of reaping

We sow what we reap

We reap more than we sow.

We reap later than we sow.

Never Forget that Sin has an Allure –

4. SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES (vv. 24-25)

Verses twenty-four and twenty-five tell us that Achan and his whole family and all his possession are taken out side the camp and stoned to death and burned.

From the list of possession given in verse twenty-four; cattle, sheep and donkeys, is a clear indication that Achan was already a wealthy man by the standards of his day. Thus Achan's theft was inspired by *greed* not by *need*.

When we examine the consequence to Achan's family and we tempted to complain that it is unfair. We would do better to fear. Fear because we realize that one man's sin turned God's presence away from a whole people. Fear because his whole household was drawn into the judgment. We generally have such a tame view of sin, we need to be taken with the contagious power of sin. Our problem is that we don't think that sin is all that big a deal. We cannot understand God's anger because sin doesn't bother us that much.

A lasting monument was constructed by the heap of stones over Achan and his family (v. 26). In fact the name "*Anchor*" which means trouble is kind of word play on Achan's name.

Conclusion

The minor prophet Hosea's unfaithful wife Gomer was representative of the unfaithful actions of the people of Israel toward God. Three times God speaks of the judgment that will fall against Gomer. Each of the three judgments is introduced by the word, "therefore." Because of her unfaithfulness God warns that he will do three things; First, (Hosea 2:6) God says, "*Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, And wall her in, So that she cannot find her paths.*" He is promising to block her actions so that she does not obtain her desires.

Secondly, he says that he will begin to deprive his disobedient child of necessities. (Hosea 2:9) "Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time And My new wine in its season, And will take back My wool and My linen, *Given* to cover her nakedness."

The third time that therefore occurs it is a direct reference to Achan and his death by stoning (Hosea 2:14)

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Will bring her into the wilderness, And speak comfort to her. (15) I will give

back her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, As in the days of

her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt."

But God has a way of turning a valley of trouble into a door of hope. Sin does bring judgment, but God can use the judgment to bring about a change in us that allow Him to turn a valley of trouble into a door of hope. [James Montgomery Boice. *Joshua We Will Serve the Lord*. (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1989) pp. 85-86]

